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ABSTRACT

This document is comprised of the four 2000 issues of a periodical published by the Australian Early Childhood Association focusing on the needs of children from birth to 8 years and on issues related to child care and early childhood education in Australia. Each issue features articles focusing on a particular theme along with editorials and regular columns related to research, child health, legal issues, ethics, and professional development. The Autumn 2000 issue focuses on using brain research in the classroom and includes the following articles: (1) "Infant Brain Research: What Is It and What Does It Mean?" (Pam Linke); and (2) "Stress-Free Environments: Promoting Healthy Brain Development" (Heather Lawrence). The Winter 2000 issue has an Olympics and child health theme and includes the following articles: (1) "Young Children's Views of Australia and Australians" (Sue Dockett); and (2) "The Olympic Games: A Critical Look at What We Teach Children" (Sally Barnes). The Spring 2000 issue highlights visions for children, families, and communities and includes the following articles: (1) "Teaching Young Children: Specialist or Not?" (Glenda MacNaughton); and (2) "Visions of Children and Childhood" (Alison Elliott). The Summer 2000 issue focuses on current issues in early childhood research and practice and includes the following articles: (1) "Should We Teach Young Children To Read?" (Mimi Wellisch); and (2) "Augmentative Communication: Assisting Special Needs Children" (Lynette Duffy). Also part of each issue are a profile of a program providing services for children, book reviews, summaries of recent events in each of the Australian states, and information for use in parent newsletters. (KB)

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The Magazine of the Australian Early Childhood Association, Inc., 2000

Alison Elliott, Editor

Volume 6, Numbers 1-4 Autumn - Summer 2000

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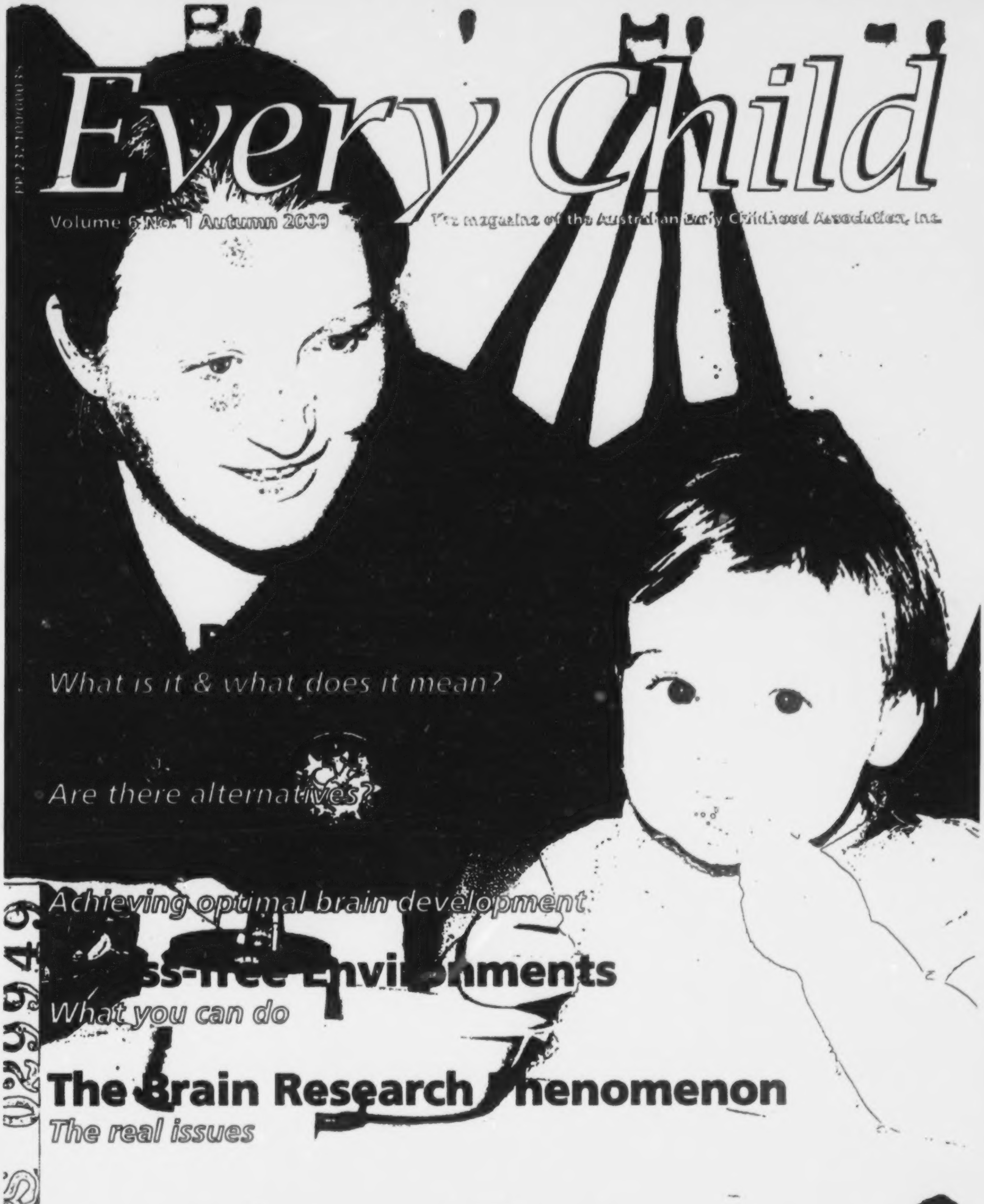

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Every Child

Volume 6 No. 1 Autumn 2000

The magazine of the Australian Early Childhood Association, Inc.

What is it & what does it mean?

Are there alternatives?

Achieving optimal brain development

ss-free Environments

What you can do

The Brain Research Phenomenon

The real issues

3

An Australian magazine focusing on the needs of children from 0–8 years

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The material published in the magazine will aim to be inclusive of children in Australia wherever they live, regardless of race, gender, class, culture, or disability.

The magazine will not publish material which runs counter to the wellbeing and equality of all children and their families, and those who work with them.

About AECA
The Australian Early Childhood Association Inc. (AECA) is a leading specialist publisher of early childhood literature. It is a national peak non-government organisation acting in the interests of young children aged 0-8, and for older children in outside school hours care. It actively promotes the provision of high quality services for all young children and their families and supports the important role of parents in caring for their children. AECA is also the national umbrella organisation for Children's Services and sees this task as supporting the advocacy role of the child care sector as a whole, without undermining the rights of each specialist organisation to operate and speak independently.

Australian Early Childhood Association, Inc.
***Every Child* Volume 6 No. 1 Autumn 2000**

Infant brain research: What is it and what does it mean?

There has recently been a renewed interest in the study of the development of the human brain. It is becoming clear that the earliest interactions and relationships babies have with adults impact profoundly on their development. In this article, Pam Linke explores the findings of research into brain development, and the implications for parents and educators of infants.

Page 4

Enrichment programs: Low-cost fix for high-risk children?

There is much debate about how best to help young children who are at high risk of having educational and social difficulties, and the current trend is to place these 'high-risk' children into enrichment programs. However, these programs may not be the only answer, as brain research and case studies have shown. In this article, Loraine Corrie discusses alternative programs for children at risk.

Page 6

The brain research phenomenon

The findings from brain research are extremely topical in popular media at the moment. However, a lack of specific detail or misinterpretation of findings can muddy the complex issues that arise from the research. In this issue of *Every Child*, Sharne Rolfe provides a clear summary of current neuroscientific findings on how the brain develops, and discusses what brain research means in a practical sense.

Page 8

Stress free environments: Promoting healthy brain development

Parents, carers, and educators want to provide stress-free and nurturing environments for children, and recent brain research tells us that this type of environment assists children's emotional and intellectual growth. Heather Lawrence explains what a nurturing environment is, and discusses practical ways to create a caring and stress-free atmosphere for children in centre-based care.

Page 10

Caring adults: A necessity for optimal brain development

A significant finding of recent brain research is that the brain is directly affected by environment and genetic inheritance. This includes the care and stimulation infants receive from adults. Sue Dockett compares how negative and positive experiences impact on a child's development, and reports on policies and practices that promote sensitive and responsive care between parents and children, and educators and children.

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Patrice Marriott— CCCAC

I was pleased to accept AECA's invitation to contribute to *Every Child*. It gives me an opportunity to tell you of the activities of the Commonwealth Child Care Advisory Council (CCCAC) to date, and of our plans for this year.

The CCCAC was established in March 1998 and held its first meeting (rather inauspiciously!) on April 1 that year. I am very proud of what we have achieved so far, and excited by our current work in progress.

> *The CCCAC's first task was to review the QIAS process for long day care.*

At the outset, the CCCAC was given two very clear references. First, the council was asked to review the Quality Improvement Accreditation System (QIAS) process for long day care centres. This included identifying ways to streamline the system, making it easier for centres to participate while still meeting children's needs and maintaining the philosophy of systematic quality improvement.

A substantial amount of investigation and analysis was conducted by and on behalf of the council to inform this review, with views obtained from parents, owners, managers and staff of long day care centres, child care peak bodies, state governments, the National Childcare Accreditation Council, academics, and other stakeholders. The views, ideas, and concerns expressed as part of this investigative phase were analysed, reports prepared, and further consultations held.

The council has now developed a number of recommendations for change to the current QIAS system. These were the subjects of information sessions held around Australia during February 2000.

I am confident that, following this process, the council will be in a position to recommend considered and well-supported proposals for change to the Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator Jocelyn Newman, in the near term.

Our second term of reference related to funding and charging practices. Our analysis involved an investigation of the economics of long day care centres around Australia and resulted in a recommendation to the minister that there be no change to current practice at this stage. We also requested a follow-on reference regarding the regulatory environment in all of the states and territories. Without wishing to pre-empt the findings of this review, which is nearing completion, it is fair to say that the regulatory environment represents a significant constraint on the sector as a whole.

The CCCAC is hopeful that its recommendations will facilitate dialogue between the relevant government bodies and lead to simplification and a general level of consistency in the regulatory regimes across Australia.

The council's other term of reference relates to child care in the year 2001 and beyond. This is futuristic work and we are challenged to think of how to present child care. General community attitudes that child care is simply 'child minding' need to be changed. There needs to be recognition of the benefit to the community in the longer term of an investment in child care, having regard also to the importance of the early years.

> *Community attitudes that child care is simply 'child minding' need to be changed*

The CCCAC would like to play a facilitating role in this area by emphasising the unique capacity of child care centres to become key elements in building and sustaining communities. There will be an extensive consultation process built into this aspect of our work, probably beginning around May 2000.

I see the CCCAC, as it approaches its second anniversary, as entering a new phase. There has been a good deal of consultation to date, but I am keen that all stakeholders find the council to be highly accessible, interactive, and as listening to their needs and concerns. We are committed to making a difference for the benefit of the child care sector as a whole, and we will deliver.

Patrice Marriott
Chair
Commonwealth Child Care Advisory Council

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EDITORIAL—*Putting 'brain research' to work in the classroom*

'Brain research' is not new. It just took a long time for it to be harnessed by education pundits and practitioners. Neuroscience, neurobiology, and cognitive science have been around for a long time, but their impact was at the margins of educational policy and practice, and mainly applied to studies of teaching maths and science at secondary level. Relatedly, cognitive psychology—the study of mind and mental functions—has not been seen as central in early childhood teacher education programs. Too often, early childhood education has sought to promote and legitimise views of development, learning, and teaching with fuzzy origins at the expense of theories and research well grounded in cognitive psychology.

> *'Evidence' promoted by 'brain research' ... has long been known by cognitive science and cognitive psychology*

Since the early 1990s, when results from 'brain research' were first used to argue the case for rich early learning experiences in the preschool years in major US reports—such as *Bridging the Gap Between Neuroscience and Education* (1996) and the Carnegie Task Force's *Years of Promise: A Comprehensive Strategy for America's Children* (1996)—the quest to harness the hype, if not the substance, of 'brain research' has grown. Indeed, the 'evidence' promoted by 'brain research' (as distinct from cognitive science, neuroscience, neurobiology etc), is generally what has long been known by cognitive science and cognitive psychology about brain development, neural functioning, and brain plasticity.

For example, knowledge about brain development reported in any standard child development text—such as the rapid increases in the synapses or neural connections in children's brains—suggests that these can be fine-tuned by experience, and brain plasticity has been largely ignored by early childhood practitioners. Indeed, making the practical leap from findings about synaptogenesis and synaptic morphology to teaching and learning in educational settings is not easy.

To date, neuroscience provides very tenuous connections to educational practice in the early childhood setting, and what is known about synaptogenesis for example, has little practical meaning for teaching and learning. But, even where there is well-established knowledge about mind and mental functioning, cognitive models, component cognitive skills etc, early childhood policy makers and educators have been reluctant to embrace this information as a basis for practice.

The fact is though, to date, there is limited specific knowledge about relationships between brain development and neural circuitry and functioning, and best educational practices and outcomes. What we have from cognitive psychology is detailed understanding of cognitive processes involved in aspects of learning such as reading and mathematics and ways in which children's brains process information, and the consequences of this knowledge for educators. What has happened most recently is that this type of knowledge has often been given a new spin and repackaged as 'brain research'.

> *There is limited specific knowledge about relationships between brain development and neural circuitry and functioning, and best educational practices*

So my view is—while the neuroscientists, cognitive scientists, and neurobiologists advance their research, let's harness both the hype AND the substance of 'brain research' to enhance the quality of early childhood services. Let's argue that all young children have the opportunity for rich, purposeful and guided learning environments in the preschool years. Importantly too, let's also draw on the well-established body of knowledge generated by cognitive psychologists, and look to a future of better integration of the work of cognitive scientists and cognitive neuroscientists and early childhood educators.

Also, let it be on the record that this renewed focus on the early years as the critical period in children's learning has major resource implications for training early childhood educators, for staff-child ratios, and for maintaining quality cognitive outcomes for children. Clearly, for children to derive maximum benefit from learning during peak synaptic development and brain activity, they must have educators who are in tune with the rich knowledge base in cognitive development, learning and teaching, and classrooms and curricula that are purposefully structured and implemented.

Alison Elliott

Erratum

In the last issue of *Every Child* (Vol. 5, No. 4, 1999), we published information about an internet skilling program at Greensborough Primary School (Casting the Net, p.5).

We incorrectly stated that the school is located in Sydney. It is actually located in Melbourne. Apologies to all at Greensborough Primary School.

Infant brain research

What is it and what does it mean?

For many years social science researchers have known that the earliest interactions have a profound effect on the development of children. Emmy Werner (1982) in her longitudinal study in Hawaii found that attachment in the first year of life, among other things, was a precursor to the ability of children and adults to achieve and to cope with the vicissitudes of life. Lyn Murray (1997) in her research in Britain showed that babies in the early months (and even weeks) of life, of mothers who were unable to respond appropriately to them because of depression, did less well both in the cognitive and social spheres in their later childhood. Heidi Als (1997) in her program with premature babies found that sensitive, responsive handling in the neonatal nursery led to much better health and developmental outcomes for babies than did the normal hospital routines.

Early brain development is affected by lack of stimulation or by chaotic, traumatic stimulation.

More recently, there has been renewed interest in the study of the development of the human brain. Brain development is the result of the combined impact of genetics, nutrition, metabolism, and behaviour on the billions of brain cells and synapses (connections). There are four well-established findings from research on the brain:

1. Infants are not born with all the interconnections already formed in their brains. After birth, there is a period of rapid synapse formation in the infant's brain, and the 'plasticity' of the brain allows parts to develop and mature at different rates. These parts have differing degrees of 'plasticity', with the cortex, the most plastic and capable of degrees of reorganisation throughout life.

2. Researchers recognise certain 'critical periods' in this development, and different periods for different brain functions, e.g. critical periods for all the visual functions in humans extend from birth up to the age of eight or nine years.
3. In animal studies, beneficial effects on brain connectivity and growth have been shown when newborn infants have been reared in a complex, enriched environment. Brain research has shown that there are critical periods of development where appropriate experiences are necessary for the optimal development of the human brain. In children who are grossly neglected, research has shown that this has a negative impact on the actual size and growth of the brain (Perry & Pollard, 1997).
4. There is also new research linking early brain development with the development of the endocrine and immune systems of the body, and their responses to stress.

If there is grossly inadequate care in infancy, the infant's brain and other abilities that depend on brain development can be compromised. So, if an infant is exposed to continual trauma or stress, the parts of the brain and the body that respond to stress may develop to be over-sensitive and ready to respond to threat even when a threat is not apparent.

Early brain development is affected by lack of stimulation or by chaotic, traumatic stimulation (Mustard, 1999). Some parts of brain function, in particular the 'higher' functioning areas such as the cortex, are able to change later in life. The research seems to show that the areas of the brain that regulate emotions and stress responses (limbic system) are organised very early in life and may not easily be changed later on. Most of the critical times for brain development appear to come before the age of six months. (For example, the ability to make some speech sounds is lost if it is not used in early life). When Romanian orphans who had been grossly neglected were adopted by caring English families they made many gains in their new homes. However, those who were adopted after the age of six months were found to make far less progress than those who were adopted earlier.

In adulthood, new or strange experiences can be stressful. However, even new experiences usually have some elements of the familiar about them which is reassuring. For example, a new job has some stress but people can call on their earlier experiences of working and knowing what to do to help them manage the stressful aspects. For infants everything is new—even nappy-changing—and therefore potentially stressful. It is the repeated sensitive responses to infants' needs over the early months that builds a sense of security and lays down the foundation for being able to cope with later demands and stresses. Dealing with infants in many different ways during this initial learning time places extra demands on the infants, making it difficult for them to learn the secure patterns of responses they need to develop secure foundations. It is important, then, for carers of infants to learn what the infants are used to, i.e. the smells and sounds and ways of talking and holding, and to ensure that the infant is not exposed to too many different and therefore stressful situations.

Dr Bruce Perry, Chief of Psychiatry at Texas Children's Hospital in Houston and a leading researcher into environment and brain development, believes that children are not resilient, they are malleable. He defines resilient as 'able to recover readily from misfortune' and malleable as 'capable of being shaped or formed' (Perry, 1997). Perry (1998) states that 'childhood experiences define the adult by shaping the developing brain'.

The new information that neuroscience brings to early childhood development has influenced major reports into services for young children in Canada and UK, with recommendations for policies that take account of the importance of this period of life.

What does all this mean for early childhood educators and parents? In essence it supports what we have known all along, i.e. that the quality of relationships with infants is fundamentally important to their present comfort and their future development. It underpins with scientific evidence the case for the highest quality care for the youngest individuals. While it does not say that infancy is the only important period of life for development, it does say that it is foundationally important and offers an opportunity and responsibility for those who care for infants to enable them to get the best possible start.

Pam Linke
Child Youth and Health, South Australia

Further reading

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Key Facts about Brain Development

- **The brain development that takes place before age one is more rapid and extensive than we previously realised.**
- **Brain development is more vulnerable to environmental influence than was previously known.**
- **The influence of early environment on brain development is long-lasting, but early influences are not totally deterministic but rather pre-dispositional, with the strength of their effects on later behaviour moderated by a variety of factors.**
- **The environment affects not only the number of brain cells and number of connections among them, but also the way these connections are 'wired'.**
- **'There is new scientific evidence for the negative impact of early stress on brain function' (Mustard, 1999. Adapted from *Starting Points*, Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1994).**

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ENRICHMENT PROGRAMS

Low-cost fix for high-risk children?

The world seems to be full of experts talking about brain research, and their words of wisdom are sprinkled liberally with 'dendrites', 'neurons' and 'windows of opportunity'. We've been told that brain research shows that children at high risk of educational and social difficulties must have enrichment programs before they are three, otherwise their chances to learn will be 'lost forever', which means that now 'developmentally appropriate are dirty words' (Hirsh, in Bruer, 1997, p.5).

Early childhood professionals must ask some serious questions before allowing brain fever to overtake them. What evidence supports the experts' opinions? What do the neuroscientists themselves say about their research findings and early childhood? What are the implications for high-risk children and early childhood practice? Why has brain research had extensive media coverage and fulsome support from politicians in several countries? We must separate facts from opinions if we are to pursue policies that provide all children with opportunities to achieve their potential.

It would be easy to think that brain research has conclusive evidence to support the experts' claims, but the researchers themselves are cautious about their findings. Many experts base their views on the results of animal studies (often rats) but the neuroscientists emphasise that the work is just beginning, much more work is needed, and it is too soon to apply their findings to children. In response to the experts' claim that enrichment programs are the answer for young high-risk children, neuroscientists say that identifying the specific influences between the environment and the brain is still their long-term goal.

One outcome of applying current brain research is that children could be 'written off' before they have a chance to achieve their potential. If we believe that opportunities to learn can be lost 'forever', what do we do about high-risk children who come into our care at age three, five, or eight? Do we abandon them as 'hopeless cases'? The stories of Jack and Dorji illustrate the dangers of this view.

Jack came to the Australian authorities' attention at the age of 12 months when neighbours reported that they could hear a baby crying for many hours of the day. He was found alone in a flat, lying in a cot surrounded by packets of chips and soft drinks and showing ample signs of abuse and neglect. He was removed from his young single mother's care and spent time in foster homes before eventually being adopted into a loving family. Jack's early traumatic experiences challenged this little boy's social and emotional development, and when he was six he responded to school with extremely disruptive behaviour. I was Jack's teacher for two years when he was placed in a withdrawal unit for children described as 'emotionally disturbed'. Jack found it difficult to trust others and form relationships, but he became a voracious learner who achieved academic success. Jack's capacity to learn increased as he grew psychologically healthy, and in time, he was able to return to a 'normal' classroom where he made good progress.

> *Early childhood professionals must ask some serious questions before allowing brain fever to overtake them*

Dorji was born into a very poor family in a remote mountain village in Nepal. As an infant, he was strapped to his mother's back all day as she worked in the fields, and as a toddler he was cared for by his five-year-old sister in their small hut. There was no running water and hygiene was poor. Food was scarce, the children were malnourished and suffered debilitating illnesses with no medication. Dorji had no access to commercial toys or books, and paper was a rare luxury in the village. When he was five he went to work in the fields to contribute to the family's survival. He left home when he was 10 to work far away from the security of his family and village.

According to some experts, it would have been a waste of time for Dorji to be educated. Like Jack, his 'deprived' upbringing should have resulted in unused synapses in his brain being pruned, meaning that his 'window of opportunity' to learn would be 'lost forever' and then, it is said, 'you're playing with a handicap' (Begley, 1996, p.56). But if this is true, how do the experts explain the fact that today Dorji is a well-qualified and highly skilled theatre nurse who can converse in four languages? Dorji learnt to read and write when he was a teenager, managed his nursing studies with ease, and now makes an invaluable contribution to the health care of his country in a busy hospital in Kathmandu.

> *Despite the claims of some experts, brain research ... has not shown us that enrichment programs for 'high-risk' young children enhance brain development*

Dorji and Jack are special but by no means unique. There are many cases that document the fine achievements of people born into difficult life circumstances. No humane person would want any child to experience abuse and neglect, poverty, hunger, or disruptions to relationships—all conditions that challenge children's healthy development—but to assume that they will never be able to learn contravenes basic human rights. Despite the claims of some experts, brain research has not shown us which children will or will not learn to read, write, and do arithmetic, and it has not shown us that enrichment programs for 'high-risk' young children enhance brain development.

Brain research provokes more questions than answers and has not yet identified the specific conditions that help or hinder children's brain development. For example, we know that infants are social beings who need to interact with nurturing and responsive caregivers, but brain research has not shown whether an hour, three hours, or six hours of interaction a day is best for brain development. We know that children have certain essential basic needs, but brain research has not shown us what precise environmental conditions influence children's capacity to learn and achieve their academic potential.

Commercial enterprise has been swift to embrace brain research but we must examine the claims made by entrepreneurs as they market their brain-based enrichment programs for infants and toddlers. The advertising 'hype' may claim that some children will not succeed without the programs, but what practices are being promoted and why? Often enrichment programs reflect white middle-class values about what is 'right' for children, which denies that there are many different pathways to healthy development and many ways for children to achieve the same competencies.

Enrichment programs imply that we need to do something to children, which reflects an individualistic and deficit view of development that does not match our current research knowledge. There are other options; for example, high-risk children can be protected from some effects of challenging life situations when they form loving and supportive relationships with early childhood professionals. Professionals are urged to put relationships at the top of their priorities and find ways to:

- relate in nurturing and sustaining ways to all children;
- form respectful relationships with all parents and families;
- create supportive and responsive environments that value and respect all children; and
- build on all children's strengths and competencies with appropriate and challenging learning experiences.

Enrichment programs offer quick-fix 'solutions', but there are no low-cost ways to ensure that all children have opportunities to achieve social and educational competencies. There are no brain enrichment programs to buy that replace the need for governments to fund high-quality early childhood care and education programs, comprehensive health care for children and families, parent education and support, adequate maternity and paternity leave, and community support. These strategies are costly and long-term, but responsible governments would accept they are essential to the wellbeing of our society.

Loraine Corrie
Edith Cowan University, WA

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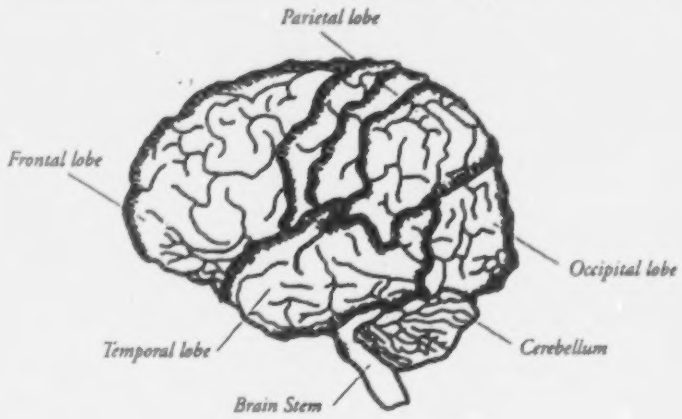
The brain research PHENOMENON



The scientific study of the brain is not new. What is new is its widespread coverage in the popular Australian and international media, particularly in relation to the developing human brain. Faced with provocative titles such as 'How to build a baby's brain', 'Off to a good start', and 'Cultivating the mind' in *Newsweek* (1997), and 'Fertile minds' in *Time* (1997), the parent and child care community is rightly fascinated with what brain research might mean for them.

The human brain consists of four parts: the cortex, the upper and lower brainstems, and the cerebellum. The cortex is of major significance in thinking and learning. It consists of probably billions of neurons joined by synapses. The cortex has two hemispheres, each with specific functions. Each hemisphere has four lobes: the frontal, parietal, temporal, and occipital. Damage to any one area has been found to impair a specific aspect of human functioning, e.g. speech, learning of words, or recognition of faces.

Of most interest is neuroscientific research showing that the development of specific areas of the brain is dependent on and influenced by certain experiences during the early weeks, months, and years. Recent brain studies are providing 'hard evidence' for what parents and early childhood educators have 'known' all along. Experience in the early years is highly significant for developmental outcomes. Of particular importance is the discovery of 'critical periods' during which experiences of a specific kind must occur for the brain to develop normally.

The idea that normal sensory, perceptual, and intellectual development is dependent upon the brain receiving certain experiences at particular times is well established. The pioneering work in this area was done more than 30 years ago. Two brain researchers, David Hubel and Torsten Wiesel, who later shared the Nobel Prize in Physiology, were publishing their work on the monkey and cat brain in the 1960s (Hubel & Wiesel, 1968). These researchers established, among other things, that, if the newborn eye is prevented from receiving visual stimulation for a period, that eye is later functionally blind, essentially because the required neural pathways simply do not develop in the absence of normal stimulation.

> *Different brain systems mature at different developmental stages.*

Other research is extending the cognitive focus to link brain organisation and social-emotional development. Two recent reports discuss these discoveries (Joseph, 1999; Perry, Pollard, Blakley, Baker & Vigilante, 1995). Joseph describes research on the area of the brain known as the limbic system. Located in the forebrain, it includes the hypothalamus, amygdala, and hippocampus. It serves the experience and expression of emotions and is associated with social-emotional development, including attachment.

Research has shown that, to develop normally, the nuclei of the limbic system require stimulation of a social, emotional, perceptual, and cognitive nature during the early months and years. If such experiences are not forthcoming, or if the environment is abnormal or repeatedly traumatic, the neurons and the connections between them are abnormal, or simply die in an accelerated fashion. According to Joseph (1999), nuclei in certain areas of the limbic system are particularly vulnerable during the first three years. He states: 'If denied sufficient (emotional) stimulation these nuclei may atrophy, develop seizure-like activity or maintain or form abnormal synaptic interconnections, resulting in social withdrawal, pathological shyness, explosive and inappropriate emotionality, and an inability to form normal emotional attachments' (p.189).

Taking this one step further, Perry et al. (1995) describe a pathway linking neurodevelopment and traumatic experience. For example, if a child (or adult) is traumatised, the brain activates a hyperarousal (fight or flight), or dissociative (freeze and surrender) pattern. In young children, by virtue of their relative powerlessness, the latter response is more common. If the trauma is frequently repeated, particularly in the early years when the brain is most 'plastic' and vulnerable (e.g. in cases of persistent child abuse) so-called 'use-dependent' changes in brain functioning occur. Over time, the response of hyperarousal or dissociation becomes a trait in the child. In practical terms, what we observe is a child (and adult) who is chronically submissive or chronically aroused.

Summarising a large and complex literature, brain research has established that:

- normal brain development is dependent on specific patterns of experience at specific times in development;
- most of these 'critical periods' are in the early years;
- if the required experience is not forthcoming at the critical time, later experience may not be able to ameliorate negative affects on brain functioning;
- the way the brain becomes organised or 'wired', as well as the number of neurons and synapses that develop, will depend on the nature of the experience it receives, particularly in the early years; and
- trauma and stress during childhood, particularly if sustained, can result in permanent changes to the organisation of the brain and hence the functional capabilities of children for the rest of their lives.

What does this brain research mean in a practical sense? And are there dangers of over-interpretation, or misinterpretation? The answer to this question varies. Gail Lindsey, in her recent article discussing brain research and its implications for early childhood education in the US (Lindsey, 1998), could hardly be more enthusiastic in her appraisal of the practical implications of neuroscientific research. She states that, on the basis of research to date, 'Americans can no longer ignore the significance of the early years' (p.97), and 'parents and educators must begin to put into practice neuroscientists' astounding findings' (p.100). But her article lacks specificity in regard to exactly what experiences are needed and exactly when they should occur. Recognising the complexity of the area, neuroscientists appear far more circumspect in regard to the practical implications of their work. Perry et al. (1995), for example, comment on a number of reasons why there are limits to the practical usefulness of brain research. Different brain systems mature at different developmental stages. Different functions have different critical periods. Some parts of the brain, e.g. the cortex, remain sensitive to experience throughout the lifespan whereas other areas, e.g. the brainstem, do not.

Complexities such as these warn against overly high expectations at the present time. In some areas, it may be that brain research can only provide empirical support for the importance of early experience in a very general sense. That is not to say that early childhood educators can, or should, ignore it. Response to the 'brain research phenomenon' in the US reveals how compelling hard evidence of this kind can be for politicians and policy-makers searching for the elusive child-care dollar. Furthermore, future studies may yet offer promise of more specific directions and interventions.

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Stress-free environments

Promoting healthy brain development

Many educators have realised the need to create nurturing and stress-free environments for children and for adults. Recent brain research tells us that experiences children have or don't have will affect the way their brain develops, and helps to justify and support these realisations. As Shore explains: 'Early care and nurture have a decisive, long lasting impact on the way people develop, their ability to learn and their capacity to regulate their own emotions' (Shore, 1997, p.27).

What is a nurturing environment?

A nurturing environment for children is one that nurtures

- trust
- individuality
- imitation
- learning potential
- adults.

Nurturing trust

Children learn best in the context of important relationships. One of the most important factors influencing healthy brain development is the relationship with key adults in the environment (Shore, 1997). A strong and secure attachment to a nurturing adult is seen to have a protective function against adverse effects of stress and trauma in later life. Perry et al. (1995) suggest that sustained stress, trauma, or emotional neglect early in life can affect brain functions such as empathy, the ability to regulate emotions, and attachment. When an infant or young child sits on your knee for a story, the nerves in her brain begin to 'fire', forging pathways and making connections to areas of the brain associated with language, thinking, emotions, and feelings of self-worth and trust. This amazing process takes place with every loving experience the infant and young child has, shaping the child's future development.

You are the mirror that reflects the personal worth of each child. What you say and what you do will be stored in the accumulation of experiences in the brain, and support the development of identity and a strong inner life in the future.

Nurturing individuality

The complex relationship between genes, environmental influence, and individual temperament identified in the research on the brain is different with every individual. All children develop in relation to their family's child-rearing practices, culture, class, gender, birth order, and their individual temperament.

Considering individual differences is a key response to our knowledge of how brain development occurs. Infants and young children respond in different ways to the same situation; therefore it is crucial for educators to tune into individual likes, dislikes, strengths, and inclinations by observing behaviour closely and responding in understanding ways.

A nurturing, stress-free environment would:

- be sensitive to individual differences at eating and resting times, arrival and departure times, and at all times during the rest of the day;
- provide culturally inclusive curricula, including books, songs, equipment, and access to a first language where necessary; and
- provide experiences that are inclusive of differing abilities and celebrate diversity of all kinds.

Nurturing imitation

The great tool children have to help them learn from their environment is the ability to imitate. Staff should never underestimate the power of imitation in the infant and young child. Remember that everything you say and do and the way you say and do it will be closely observed by the child. These experiences are absorbed by the child, often imitated, and will have a long-lasting effect on the overall development in the future. Staff should try to develop a cooperative, supportive climate by modelling empathy and care for others, and respect for children's interests and desires.

> *You are the mirror that reflects the personal worth of each child.*

A nurturing, stress-free environment would:

- encourage an abundance of laughing, singing, and humming with infants and young children;
- allow children to hear the sound of birds, busy children, and happy human voices; and
- allow infants and young children to see adults caring for the environment and fully engaged and happy in their own work, e.g. gardening, cleaning windows.

Nurturing learning potential

An important tool children use in the learning process is the drive to be actively involved in everything! This natural and sometimes relentless need is absolutely vital to healthy brain development. Schiller (1998) tells us that healthy brain development occurs when children have their senses activated in pleasurable ways and when they actively participate in their environment. Remember that infants and toddlers are sensory motor beings. Young children over three bring the added skill of imagination that develops out of their experiences. It is through repetition of experiences, imitation, and imaginative play that the brain develops and learning in all areas of development takes place.

A nurturing and stress-free environment would:

- allow long, uninterrupted time for imaginative play;

- encourage cubby play inside and outside, and provide enough materials to achieve it;
- spend more time outside than inside each day;
- provide hands-on opportunities for sensory experiences for long periods every day;
- provide many opportunities and the accessories and loose parts necessary for imaginative play, allowing children to act out dilemmas, solve problems, and practise social skills, and pre-literacy skills;
- encourage children's attempts at mastering and developing skills, through play and their efforts to help with work. Allow plenty of time for this to occur; and
- provide opportunities for children to be in control and make decisions for themselves sometimes.

Nurturing adults

The nurturing environment is one that seeks to create an atmosphere of respect and love for all who come there. Infants and young children need to be in the presence of relaxed, happy adults.

A nurturing and stress-free environment would:

- provide for the needs, interests, and beliefs of the adults who work there and the parents and carers who bring their children;
- value early childhood staff's interests and ideas, acknowledge and appreciate the work they do, and create conditions for them to love what they do and the children they work with;
- support parents' needs (many parents need nurturing and support to de-stress their lives and create homes to nurture their children; helping parents understand our wish to support them when they arrive to leave or collect their child is an integral part in the creation of a nurturing environment); and
- assist staff to feel strong and secure in themselves and their trust in children.

Are nurturing, stress-free environments just a dream?

The question of whether stress-free environments can be achieved in centre-based care where large groups of children exist and where ratios of children to adults are inadequate must continue to be raised. In some states substantial changes to regulations will be called for if we are really serious about advocating for the rights of young children, and if we wish to create environments which will optimise healthy brain development. The question is: Do we have the courage?

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In a nurturing and stress-free environment staff will:

- **encourage loving relationships and secure attachments with infants and young children;**
- **provide cosy places for children to be cuddled by parents on arrival and departure;**
- **observe and listen carefully to understand underlying troubles and concerns children may have;**
- **create a place that feels like home where children can be held whenever they need and be loved for exactly who they are; and**
- **find time to talk to children gently and tenderly and look into their eyes with affirmation.**

Caring adults

A necessity for optimal brain development

'Let's go,' called the adult.

'Goooo,' replied the toddler, 'gooo.'

Together they laughed and ran around the room before finding a comfortable space to sit and read the books the child had chosen.

'Dis,' said the toddler as he held out one book.

'This one? OK, let's read this one,' replied the adult.

Interactions similar to this one happen many times each day in homes and early childhood settings around Australia. Early childhood educators have long known that warm, responsive interactions between young children and adults provide an important basis for social, emotional, and cognitive development. New brain research provides yet more evidence of the importance of these relationships and interactions. In repeated interactions such as this, a range of brain cells is stimulated and 'turned on'. As well, some existing connections between brain cells are triggered, and yet more connections can be developed.

The advent of new technologies for brain imaging has enabled researchers to investigate the development and workings of the brain in great detail. One area where these techniques have been applied is in the investigation of brain development during infancy. Newberger (1997) reports that the findings affirm what many parents and caregivers have known for years, i.e. that '(1) good prenatal care, (2) warm and loving attachments between young children and adults, and (3) positive age-appropriate stimulation from the time of birth really do make a difference in children's development' (p.4).

One of the significant findings of the recent research into brain development is that the brain is directly affected by environment as well as by genetic inheritance. In the words of Shore (1997):

> *... Throughout the entire process of development, beginning even before birth, the brain is affected by environmental conditions, including the kind of nourishment, care, surroundings, and stimulation an individual receives. The impact of the environment is dramatic and specific, not merely influencing the general direction of development, but actually affecting how the intricate circuitry of the brain is wired (p.ix).*

Brain functioning depends on brain cells (the neurones) and the connections between these cells (the synapses). The more connections there are, and the stronger these connections, the more efficient the brain is in passing messages from one part to another. In the first three years of life, the number of synapses in a child's brain increases rapidly. Shore (1997, p.x) notes that this is why early experiences are crucial: 'Synapses that have been activated many times by ... repeated experience tend to become permanent; the synapses that are not used often enough tend to be eliminated.'

The care young children receive in their early years has a substantial impact on brain development. Positive interactions and secure attachments, characterised by warm, nurturing, and sensitive care, can stimulate and strengthen neural connections. Negative experiences, characterised by inconsistent, unpredictable, stressful or unstimulating patterns of interaction, have the potential to weaken some neural connections and to inhibit the development of others.

The work of Gunnar and Barr (1998) describes one of the ways in which this can occur, through the body's production of cortisol, a hormone that enables all of us to cope in times of stress. High levels of cortisol cause a weakening of the connections between brain cells, as well as a reduction in the number of brain cells. Hence, children who regularly experience stressful environments may produce high levels of cortisol which, in turn, may have a negative impact on brain function and development.

On the other hand, positive, nurturing interactions and experiences, as well as stimulating brain growth and activity, can also act as a buffer against occasional negative or stressful experiences. The child who feels loved, valued, respected, and assured of his/her own worth is more likely to bounce back from such experiences than the child who experiences mainly negative, impersonal, or neglectful situations on a regular basis. This does not suggest that children should be placed in stressful situations. Rather, it recognises that children face stressful situations at different times in their lives (such as vaccinations, separating from parents, starting school or child care, moving house, adjusting to a new sibling), and that having a caring adult as a support in such situations makes these more manageable for children.

The importance of secure attachments for children and positive interactions between carers and children is reaffirmed in the findings of the brain research: 'Children learn in the context of

important relationships. The best way to help very young children grow into curious, confident, able learners is to give them warm, consistent care so that they can form secure attachments to those who care for them' (Shore, 1997, p.29).

What does this mean for early childhood educators?

Firstly, it does not mean that child care outside the home is bad for young children. However, it does mean that it is important for child care to be organised in ways that strengthen and support attachments between children and adults. This view recognises that young children can and do form attachments with a number of adults, and that high quality child care does not weaken a child's attachment to parents.

> *... Children who regularly experience stressful environments may produce high levels of cortisol*

The importance of high quality care does not start only when children enter early childhood services. As a community, we need to emphasise the value of family access to support services and resources, such as prenatal care; responsive care before, during and after childbirth; parental leave; work-based care; affordable and high quality child care and health care for families. These services can assist parents and carers in providing care which facilitates the development of secure attachments and supports positive and predictable care of young children.

In early childhood services, we need to consider policies and practices which promote sensitive and responsive care between parents and children, and educators and children. Examples could include:

- encouraging mothers to breastfeed in the centre by providing the necessary space, resources, and support;
- promoting opportunities for parents to spend time with their children in the centre;
- implementing a program of primary caregiving between staff and children;
- providing links to other services, such as health programs;
- taking the time to build and develop relationships with children and parents.

The new brain research provides a unique opportunity to promote the value and importance of the early years of life. It provides a great deal of research from diverse fields, including neuroscience, education, family studies, public health, and paediatrics, which supports the long-held view of many early childhood educators that healthy relationships during the early years of life are critical for the optimal development of young children.

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Cognitive DEVELOPMENT and the law

Cognitive development in the first three years of a child's life has been the focus of interest from psychologists and scientists for the past century. Of particular interest has been the interaction between environmental circumstances and genetic inheritance in relation to abilities such as language development. With the increasing numbers of children in early childhood programs, it was inevitable that the debate would turn to the long-term effects of these programs on cognitive and school outcomes. Once this type of attention develops, it can be expected that issues such as legal impact will arise.

During the 1990s, many studies examined the contribution of early childhood care and education (ECCE) on the health, development, and future wellbeing of children, particularly those from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

Native cognitive ability is often confused with IQ test measurements.

The more recent studies have examined the relevance of the child's home environment, family circumstances, and the long-term impact of child care. Several research papers have noted the general confusion in the minds of the public over the definition of the impact of environment on intelligence. Native cognitive ability (how smart you are) is often confused with IQ test measurements. Achievement tests, on the other hand, measure ability and knowledge in areas of reading. Mathematics have also focused on accomplishment and achievement. One review of 36 programs conducted by Professor Steve Barnett in 1995 noted that ECCE was associated with increased commitment to the school, better relationships with friends and neighbours, and lower delinquency rates. He concluded from the review that ECCE could produce large effects on IQ during early childhood, sizeable persistent effects on achievement and grades, and improved socialisation skills, especially for children from low-income families.

What are the legal implications from these studies? The legal risks inherent in teaching are increasing across all child care environments. This has been brought about by a combination of changing attitudes, increased accountability, and regulation.

...Teachers and carers [should] keep written records of advice given to parents

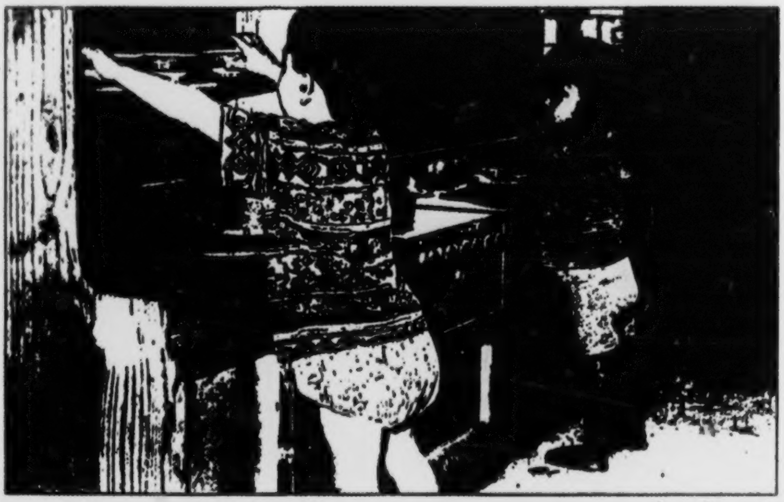
As more parents become concerned with their children's progress and desire academic excellence, carers and teachers will find themselves increasingly asked to give advice on how best to ensure optimum development for the child. The law recognises that individuals who are held to have particular expertise and who give advice to someone who relies on that advice will be potentially liable for damages if there is a loss arising as a result of that advice. It is important that teachers and carers are competent to give and qualify the information they do give, and make it clear what should or should not be relied upon as expert advice.

It is quite possible to provide information about the development of a child that a parent could interpret as being some form of psychological profile, when, in fact, it is outside the expertise of the teacher or the carer. Similarly, the increasing tendency of parents to blame teachers or educators for their child's inability to learn continues to expose teachers and carers to the difficulties of court actions in the future. Individuals have alleged that they have received defective education, or that they have had developmental learning problems which have not been diagnosed by teachers in time for them to be able to attend corrective programs.

It is recommended that, for the sake of managing legal risk exposures, teachers and carers keep written records of advice given to parents. Generally, any advice given should be in some objective format that is applied to all children. Where there are particular circumstances of an unusual nature specific to one child, the advice given should be recorded in a way which explains why it was given and the basis for that advice. A little care and sensitivity can go a long way in avoiding litigation.

Marianne Robinson
Compliance Consultant

Babies: Setting their own curriculum



In 1999 co-manager of Mooringe Child Care Centre in Adelaide, SA, Helen Ketley, was one of 11 South Australian early childhood educators invited to participate in the *Critical Teaching Project*, an initiative of the Department of Education, Training and Employment's Early Years Curriculum Unit. Led by Dr Glenda MacNaughton from the University of Melbourne, the group learned how—through a process of critical reflection, debate and discussion, and recording thoughts and practices—they could improve their practices and the services they were providing.

Children may not want what we set up for them

As part of this process, Helen examined how educators relate to children about what it is they want to learn and, over a four-week period, went about collecting video evidence of young children in her centre taking control of their own learning. Most services, she points out, set up environments on behalf of children without enabling them to have any control. 'And the children may not want what we set up for them, and if they don't want to do what has been presented they are not going to remain focused. What we found was when we started to allow them [the two- to two-and-a-half-year-olds] the opportunity to control their environment, they were actually sitting for 25 minutes at one task and actually interacting because they felt comfortable with it,' she says.

From a simple experiment based on 'tuning into' children's visual cues Helen and her staff learned a lot about the sort of environment each baby was most comfortable in. Staff also discovered that if the environment was too stimulating or too dull, the babies would resort to familiar experiences, such as playdough. The video evidence then allowed the staff to reflect on how they could incorporate these points into the current program. As a result, Helen says, we encourage the under-twos to choose. 'So they actually have time where they can go and pick something off the shelf … you can see them looking at the shelf and making decisions. They design the environment; they've got the control.'

'We will continually strive to improve what we are offering'

'What we've done here is look at how we can enable children to have maximum control over their environment,' Helen says. And ensuring that the children have consistent carers so they can form a safe nurturing bond gives them confidence to be able to move away and explore, and is an important facet of this. If they are in their 'comfort zone', Helen adds, when they are presented with a challenge they set about tackling it without fear.

The curriculum also involves the observation and the documentation 'of everything!' Helen says. 'Part of the process during the project was keeping a reflective journal. We are continuing on with that because each time we finish exploring something we sit down at the end and ask "What do you think we got out of that?", "How can we improve that?", "Will that reflect on this?" etc.'

The process has helped identify which of the current curriculum and programming methods used are labour intensive and don't allow enough staff time with the children, 'so we are looking at that side of it and continually exploring how to improve the quality of the contact,' says Helen. 'We will continually … strive to improve what we are offering, which means that the children can only benefit.' And they will be doing that through questioning, through research, and also through the networks with others.

The networking and constant reflection is vital, Helen says, and the success of the centre is proof of this work. 'The success is being demonstrated through the low noise levels here … we have 85 children [who] are busy and are enjoying themselves.'

Whatever the future, the outlook is good. As Helen says, 'The future is unknown as far as we are concerned because someone may turn up something we have not thought of.'

LT

IRON

The key to better learning

A leading Australian paediatrician, Professor Geoff Cleghorn of the University of Queensland, has said it is critical that children receive a balanced diet, including sufficient intakes of iron, to help learning and development. His expert comment is timely, given that children have resumed school, and also in light of a recently published study (Otero, Aguirre, Porcayo & Fernandez, 1999) showing the link between diet and performance.

The study shows that performance in six- to 12-year-old school children whose diets were lacking in essential nutrients, especially iron, tended to lack concentration and had difficulty in remembering what they had learned. Intelligence Quotient (IQ) testing has also shown that intellectual development is lower, and that there may be lower levels of comprehension.

'Carers and parents need to be aware of the importance of a balanced diet to ensure that children are functioning at their absolute best. Although diets low in fat are appropriately being advocated for adults, these are not recommended for children. Unfortunately, red meat is seen as being high in fat and parents immediately think this means cutting meat out of the diet, but in reality this is not recommended for developing children because of the strong meat and iron link. In addition, meat isn't fattening in the way people perceive it to be,' said Professor Cleghorn.

Lean red meat is arguably the best natural source of iron, which plays a vital role in transporting oxygen around the body—particularly to the brain. Iron is one of the most critical nutrients for intellectual development, and iron-rich foods such as lean red meat are often described as brain food.

Iron deficiency can have a negative effect on concentration, memory, and even basic motor skills

There are two types of iron: haem iron—found in red meat, seafood, and poultry; and non-haem iron—found in breads, fruits, vegetables, and cereals. Haem iron is up to 10 times easier for the body to absorb than non-haem iron, and lean red meat is the richest source of haem iron. In fact, lean red meat contains three times as much iron as chicken or fish. A balanced diet should include lean red meat and vitamin–C rich foods, which improve iron absorption from vegetables, breads, legumes, and cereals.

According to Professor Cleghorn, iron deficiency can have a negative effect on concentration, memory, and even basic motor skills. 'There is evidence that up to 25 per cent of Australian children under the age of two may be iron deficient. These children are at risk for having poorer outcomes with respect to psychomotor development and are therefore not realising their ultimate potential. This may then have a negative impact upon school performance and hence ultimate wellbeing. If this deficiency continues into school age then these problems may only be compounded,' he said.

Professor Cleghorn is frequently asked how parents and carers can ensure that children are eating a balanced diet to help learning and development. 'Meals should include a variety from all food groups, especially iron-rich foods. Lean red meat is a healthy choice—the richest source of haem iron—and readily accessible in Australia.'

Geoffrey Cleghorn
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If you would like to find out more about balanced eating for children, contact an Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) for advice. Phone the APD hotline on 1800 812 942 to find an APD near you.

OBSERVING BABIES

The silent community

In 1999, Sharon Saitta and Maureen Robinson worked together in the babies room of the Swanston Street Children's Centre at the University of Melbourne. They worked with 10 babies each day, ranging in age from three months to one year. Sharon and Maureen actively observed individual children and the group on a weekly basis as a part of planning, extending, and evaluating the centre's program. Their observations included anecdotal records, checklists, and running records; photographs, and audio and video taping.

In November Maureen, Sharon, and I started to question whether we had the right to observe babies and what ethical dilemmas this posed. Following is a snippet of our conversation.

Maureen *I hadn't thought about the ethics of observing babies because documents such as the* Quality Improvement and Accreditation System; Babies, Toddlers and Two Year Olds, *and* Curriculum Frameworks for Early Childhood Settings: Foundation Areas of Learning *all argue that observation is fundamental in assisting in the development of high quality programs.*

Sharon *I know that what I observe is very subjective as I cannot separate who I am—that is my gender, sexuality, class, culture, race, and my history—from my role as the observer.*

Maureen *How and what you observe also reflects what sort of day you are having in the room. If the day has been really unsettled and you are tired it can cloud your view of what is happening for a child.*

Sharon *Hang on! What does that mean if a baby doesn't want to be observed, say if she's feeling tired or feels like the day has been hectic? We don't ask the babies for permission to observe them. We make assumptions within a developmental framework that the babies don't understand what we are doing.*

Approaches to documentation such as Reggio argue that children's rights are given a voice and endorsed because children and teachers collaborate in the recording of children's developmental skills, as well as emotional concerns, social relations, creative ideas, and intellectual pursuits. Through this process children's rights are not only given a voice but are endorsed (New, 1997). However, because babies are not seen as having particular verbal skills, they are rarely, if ever, asked to participate in observation, or to contribute their ideas and concerns to verbal discussions.

> *How often do we stop to consider what the silence of a young child means?*

Maureen *How do we observe the baby that is quietly working in an area and not interacting with anyone in the room?*

Sharon *I tend to give them space to be by themselves.*

Jonathon Silin (1999) talks about the need to consider silences as not only a form of resistance but also as a form of reflection and the formation of identity. How often do we stop to consider what the silence of a young child means?

This discussion has become a forum for further debate, questioning, self-reflection, and evaluation in the centre. Questions being debated today include:

- How do we give babies a voice in the observation process?
- How can we consider and document the silences of babies?
- How do we recognise and disclose the effects of our subjectivity within observation?

We continue to grapple with these and many other questions around the ethics of observing babies.

Maureen Robinson, Sharon Saitta
& Kylie Smith
University of Melbourne
Swanston Street Children's Centre

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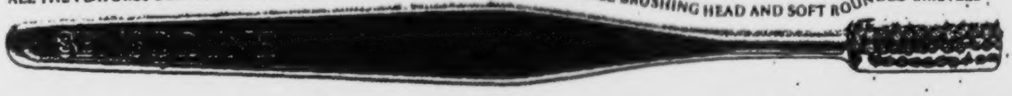

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Kids' ISLAND

A world in a very small space

A few years ago Sarah Main and colleagues at the Australian Museum had a dream of providing a dedicated interactive playspace for under-fives. Having already consulted with early childhood professionals about a similar playspace in 1995, they sought further opinion about whether these spaces should be integrated into larger exhibitions. 'Anything and everything!' was the response. In 1997 the museum applied for funding from the state government, received $300,000 for the project, and dedicated a very small space for the purpose. But, the space had a very, very high ceiling! And they managed to fit a world into it!

Sarah is one of a team of education project officers at the Australian Museum in Sydney. A trained primary teacher currently studying for her Masters in Early Childhood, Sarah was overwhelmed by the support provided by many early childhood professionals when she and the team members—one with a secondary science teaching background, one an ecologist, and one an architect—started planning the space.

The team officially formed in January '98 and as a starting point consulted with Sue Dockett and Cathie Harrison from the University of Western Sydney (UWS), Macarthur. 'Sue and Cathie were wonderful mentors and very supportive, and in the first six months of the project we also talked to a lot of others in the early childhood community and found people were really happy to help,' says Sarah.

Sarah and her team also consulted with UWS, Nepean, the Institute of Early Childhood (especially Mia Mia), Sydney Day Nursery, and KidsSafe at the Children's Hospital. They also formed a focus group which included the Kindergarten Union and the Playgroup Association. Market research made an important contribution to the process, with three different groups of parents canvassed for their opinions.

'We spent months thinking about how children learn,' Sarah says, 'And we wanted the environment to do the teaching, with no primary colours, no bright lights … I believe children can be more subtle than that … they can appreciate complexity; there is no need to take the mega toy store approach with them,' she says.

In order to fit everything they wanted into the small space, the architect suggested different levels which could incorporate a shipwreck (sunk into the floor), a forest (with a wombat burrow), a house, an area for babies (including nappy changing facilities, etc.), and a hot-air balloon floating above the whole thing. 'And that's what we've built!' Sarah exclaims.

Kids' Island opened at the end of May last year. 'The hot-air balloon has a ramp up and a tube slippery-dip down … and kids can get the "jiggles" out without disturbing anyone else! We have subdued colours with the walls covered in murals (such as the seashore blending into forest), real stuffed animals (but up high as many children find them frightening; they can touch them but aren't confronted by them), and it's all working incredibly well.

> *'We wanted the environment to do the teaching'*

'It's one project which I feel we've really done right,' Sarah says. 'It's used so well; it's based on play, and the children set the agenda. I'm very happy with it.'

Sarah and her team are currently working on a booklet about 'going to the museum' which will be available in about June this year, and are also working on an idea of a 'museum in a box' service, 'but this is based on funding which is very tight,' she says.

'I see my role as ensuring young voices are heard [and] introducing them to natural science and their cultural heritage. Kids' Island has been a very exciting project. It's made a very positive statement.' *LT*

For more information about Kids' Island please phone Sarah Main on (02) 9329 6321, or for bookings phone Wendy Dowers on (02) 9329 6163.

Brainstorm in a teacup

'Mum, guess what!' seven-year-old Jack mumbles through a mouthful of toast and Vegemite. 'Darren's dad saw his brain on TV!'

'*What?*' I say, startled.

It transpires that Darren's dad had a brain scan because he was getting bad headaches. The 'TV' must have been a monitor.

'*I've* got a bad headache,' Daisy announces. Daisy, four, is the family hypochondriac. And she's feeling left out of the breakfast-table conversation.

But Jack has lost interest in Darren's dad and is now wanting to know why there's only Vegemite to put on his toast.

I apologise for running out of peanut butter. Jack says he's tired of peanut butter.

'Well, what would you like?' I ask. 'Jam, honey, marmalade, lemon butter, cheese spread ... '.

Jack pulls a face.

The brain is like a muscle
(Carl Sagan Broca's Brain, Ch. 2.)

I'm not in the mood for picky kids at this time in the morning. I write 'peanut butter' on the shopping list.

Daisy says plaintively, 'I wish I could see my brain on TV.'

Jack sniggers. 'They'd never be able to find it, peabrain.'

'Mum!' Daisy wails. 'Tell him to stop calling me names!'

'Birdbrain,' Jack hisses.

They continue to squabble as I herd them out of the door and into the car for the horror run to child care (Daisy), school (Jack), and the office (me). Being a sole parent can be hell at times. This is one of them.

Daisy wants to know what Jack means when he cackles that if she had another brain it'd be lonely.

I doubt if he knows himself. Where does he pick up these things?

Lunchtime, I take my (Vegemite) sandwiches into the office tearoom.

* * *

'God, I'm so tired today!' sighs Jenny, our accountant, dangling a teabag in a cup of hottish water. 'Talk about feeling brain-dead!'

'Well, *that's* one Jack hasn't come up with yet!' I say.

Jenny wants an explanation. I explain.

'I've got brains on the brain,' I sigh.

Jenny giggles, then says, 'There was something on telly last night about research into the relationship between a baby's sleep patterns and its brain development. It seems they do better the longer they sleep.' She removes the teabag. 'Were your two good sleepers when they were babies?'

'Yes, thank heavens!' I say. 'They were good as gold ... until they started crawling and getting into everything.'

Rachel from Despatch, investigating the contents of her salad roll, says reproachfully, 'They were *exploring*. I was reading this article about early childhood development.' (Rachel is newly pregnant and reads everything she can lay her hands on about babies.) 'It said the environment surrounding a young child, and the stimulation it receives, determines how its brain is wired. And it said something about how neglect of young children has a negative impact on the actual size of the brain.'

So I worry for the rest of the afternoon. Perhaps it was a mistake to go back to work when Daisy was only four months old.

When my mother calls that night, I tell her what Rachel said. 'Is Jack smarter than Daisy because I spent more time with him?' I ask anxiously.

'Don't be silly,' she says. 'Jack is smarter than Daisy because he's three years older.' She has a point.

* * *

In the supermarket, Jack is whingeing that he's sick of boring old Vegemite and peanut butter, and why can't we have 'something different'.

Daisy, on tiptoe, is peering into a glass case in the meat section.

'What *that*?' she asks, pointing to the greyish-pinkish shapes neatly arranged on little plastic trays.

'Brains,' says Jack with relish.

'YUK!' Daisy recoils in horror.

Jack reads the label. '*Lambs*' brains,' he amplifies with glee.

Daisy's favourite nursery rhyme is 'Mary had a Little Lamb'. She starts to bawl.

I hustle her away from the source of her distress.

Well, *that's* something different we won't be having on toast for breakfast.

Sally O'Sullivan

Learning about the importance of infancy

Want to find out more about the effects of early environment on brain development and what is happening about it?

There is a lot of information available to you on the internet from your own office or home computer. It can take some time and patience to retrieve what you need from the world wide web but it can also be well worth the effort.

Here are some sites that have challenging and important information about the early years.

- http://www.childsec.gov.on.ca/

This is the site for the Canadian Government *Early Years Study*. It is a long report and you may not want to read or print all of it. However, Chapter 1, *Neuroscience and Early Child Development*, gives an excellent overview of the research into the impact of environment on brain development. Because it is a government report it is written in language that is understandable to non-scientists. The chapter on the recommendations the report makes to the Canadian Government is also important.

- http://www.bcm.tmc.edu/civitas/

This is the website for the Texas Child Trauma Centre where there are a number of research papers, including some by Dr Bruce Perry, a leading researcher into the impact of environment on development. In particular, some of the articles address the impact of early stress and trauma (such as neglect or abuse) on the development of the brain. Look under *New Research* and *Materials for Professionals*.

- http://www.pediatrics.org/cgi/content/full/103/5/1031

This URL (web address) will take you to an article by Dr Eisenberg (Emeritus Professor of Social Medicine and Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School) in the American professional paediatrics journal (*Pediatrics*). The article is written for doctors but is a readable and useful article on the way the brain develops and how environments can affect this. The article also has lots of references if you want to look further. Please note that you will be asked to pay to access this article.

- http://cf.psychoanalysis.net/fonagy.htm

In spite of the name of this site—which implies that the information is about psychoanalysis—this report is a broad based assessment of *Early Influences On Development and Social Inequalities*. Dr Fonagy was invited by Sir Donald Acheson (who is conducting an independent for the British Government inquiry into the inequities in health care) to review current knowledge on early influences on development as it pertains to social inequalities and to make proposals for policy changes. The paper is an overview of research into what affects early development and what programs have been shown to be helpful. This is a very important and valuable report.

- http://www.mhsource.com/pt/p960348.html

This will take you to an article written by Dr Dan Siegel, who is a psychotherapist in private practice and medical director of the Infant and Preschool Service at the University of California. It is more technical and specific in language, so not as easy to read as the above articles. It is also more about individual development and relationships than what society can do. It looks at the relationship of brain development to attachment. It also discusses the importance of communication and narrative in both development and in treatment of attachment difficulties, so has relevance to early childhood educators as well as to those in the healing professions.

- http://www.abc.net.au/rn/talks/bbing/index/bbchronoidx.htm

This will take you to the transcript of Dr Fraser Mustard's (co-author of the Canadian early years report) interview on ABC radio, titled *Reversing the Real Brain Drain*.

Finally, there is the *National Initiative for the Early Years* email list. You can join this list by sending an email to mailserv@Newcastle.edu.au, and including in the body of the message SUBSCRIBE NIFTEY-LIST, to be updated about what is happening in Australia and also be alerted to new research and reports. (Make sure you spell it exactly as it appears above.)

Pam Linke
Internet Client Services Coordinator
Child and Youth Health, SA

REVIEWS

Children's Services and the GST – a Guide

Commonwealth GST Start-up Assistance Program

Canberra: AECA (2000)

ISBN 1 875890 43 2 RRP $10.00

This book provides an easy-to-read, step-by-step guide for children's services on the goods and services tax (GST). The information is succinct and well organised, and carefully guides the reader through the haze that has been generated by the complete restructuring of the taxation system.

The book is organised into four parts. Part A briefly introduces the GST legislation as it affects children's services, and then explores basic business and accounting systems. These chapters are important for those services that struggle to 'come to grips' with accounting systems such as revenue and expenditure statements, balance sheets, and cash flow reports. As these are essential tools for managing GST requirements, it is important that services understand and use the information these provide. The time spent reading these chapters will provide an understanding of how to use accounting information in financial decision-making processes. For those services that are 'accounting system literate', these chapters can be skipped over.

Part B examines the GST and what it means for children's services. It provides a process for services to follow to assess whether or not they should register for the Australian Business Number, the GST, and the Deductible Gift Recipient endorsed status.

Part C reviews the administration requirements and responsibilities of services. It takes the reader through reporting requirements of the GST, daily financial transaction processes, and the impact of accrual and cash accounting practices on the service's cash flow.

Part D has a valuable 'Frequently asked questions' section and is referenced for further information.

This book, in addition to being a very valuable guide in its own right, also forms the basis of the national training the AECA has commissioned for children's services. This is a timely and important resource for services to assist them in implementing the GST.

Jennifer Evans
Director, Uniting Church, NSW Synod,
Children's Services Forum

Babies: Responding Appropriately to Infants

Marilyn Fleer & Pam Linke

Canberra: AECA (1999)

ISBN 1 875890 39 4 RRP $9.95

According to the 1996 census figures, eight per cent of all infants under 12 months in Australia are cared for in child care services outside the home. This means that more than 20,000 infants are currently being cared for in child care centres, family day care homes, and occasional care centres. Given these statistics, and recent findings from neurological research about the importance of the first 12 months in a child's life, it is not surprising that there is increasing concern about the quality of care infants receive.

Until recently, child care professionals have had to rely on resources from overseas to help them develop high quality programs for infants. Fortunately, this trend is now being addressed by an increasing number of Australian publications focusing expressly on the needs of very young children in child care. *Babies: Responding Appropriately to Infants* by Marilyn Fleer and Pam Linke provides Australian caregivers with a practical resource of games and interaction styles based upon current research and understandings about infant development.

The first half of the booklet provides a brief overview of current research and how it relates to practice in the child care environment. The second half provides caregivers with practical examples of interactive games and relationship-building activities that foster infant development. These are presented in an easy-to-use chart that clearly describes the nature of the interaction and its benefits to the child. The authors use a case study of a single child to explain and illustrate particular points, making it easy for caregivers to link theory to practice.

The focus on the importance of personal, intimate relationships and interactions with infants and the use of routines to provide opportunities for these interactions makes this booklet essential reading for anyone caring for infants on a regular basis.

Teresa Hutchins
Lecturer, Children's Studies
Edith Cowan University

Will There be a Lap For Me?

Dorothy Corey

Morton Grove: Albert Whitman (1992)

ISBN 0807 591106 RRP $9.95

Available from The Book Garden

Will There be a Lap For Me? is a story for very young children about the birth of a new baby in the family. Research shows that this is one of the most stressful times in a young child's life. This stress can often lead to emotional problems which may be seen as behaviour problems, sleep problems, and regression in areas such as toilet training. Ms Corey's attractively illustrated book shows the mixture of feelings that the young child has when his place in the family is taken by the baby.

The rhythmic words and repetition help to make the book both reassuring and enjoyable for very young children. The detail in the illustrations is an added attraction, e.g. the parallel of birds building a nest, and the toy lion which to some extent mirrors the child's experiences. The illustrator has a subtle sense of humour, as the round oranges reflect the roundness of the mother's new shape, and, when the 'seat room' on the mother's lap is disappearing, mother and toddler are shown on a bus with standing room only!

In the best tradition of bibliotherapy, the book encompasses a range of feelings, although the child's emotion is shown mainly as sadness, rather than the anger and defiance which often overlie the sadness.

This book is highly recommended for child care and kindergarten libraries, to be read to children and to be borrowed by parents to read to their own children in this situation. It is an inexpensive book which parents may be prepared to buy if their child finds it helpful, as the best benefit from this kind of book is often gained when children can hear the story over and over again as often as they want to.

Pam Linke
Child and Youth Health, SA

Look, Listen and Learn

Joan Faragher & Eve Salter

Victoria: TAFE Publications RMIT (1994)

ISBN 0 7306 6000 1 RRP $19.95

Available from AECA

Look, Listen and Learn describes itself as a 'practical resource book that provides ideas for stimulating children's interest in their natural surroundings'. My own experience with maths and science is limited, which is a very good reason why someone like myself should have this book as a resource! This book stimulates the interest of adults working with children before implementing the experience. Background information and sequential experiences for children that support the planning of quality programs are plentiful within the text. Diagrams and illustrations throughout the book highlight the learning areas.

Experiences contained within the text are designed to allow children to be active participants, and to wonder and discover. Each discovery is reinforced through the introduction of new words. Chapters are divided into sections that build upon the knowledge for each topic. Headings include background to the topic, experiences for children, concepts, language, and further reference books for children.

The developmental level of each experience, in order of complexity, is indicated by a symbol. Age is not used as an indicator of development, recognising the difference between chronological age and developmental stage. To illustrate the relevance of each experience to 'real' settings, an account of their implementation is included at the end of each chapter. This emphasises the important role that adults play 'in initiating and extending children's opportunities to look, listen and learn'.

Look, Listen and Learn provides those responsible for the care and education of children up to eight years of age with the ideas to include science and maths within their program using everyday examples. An excellent resource for those working in the early childhood field.

Debbie Harrod
The Forest Preschool, Sydney

Book Reviews
Book Reviews
Book Reviews
Book Reviews

Saris and Skirts: Gender equity and multiculturalism

Glenda MacNaughton

Canberra: AECA (1999)

ISBN 1 875890 41 6 RRP $9.95

This AECA Research in Practice Series title invites early childhood professionals to reflect on gender equity within the context of multiculturalism. The aim of the book is to offer ways to overcome the challenges associated with achieving gender equity within the culturally and ethnically diverse landscape of contemporary Australia.

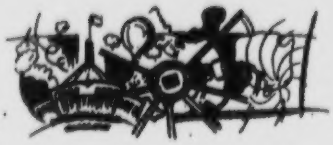
The book challenges the reader to move beyond simplistic notions of gender and racial identity to more complex understandings. According to the author, making gender/culture identity connections is a complex process that creates specific challenges. A major premise of the book is that differences within cultures are just as normal as differences and similarities between cultures. Based on this premise, the author proposes that 'we need to see that not all Anglo-Australians 'do' gender in the same way and not all Indian-Australians 'do' gender in the same way' (p.3). The reader is encouraged throughout the book to rethink approaches to issues of gender within and between cultures.

Saris and Skirts offers sound practical advice about achieving gender equity in multicultural contexts. This advice comes in the form of a set of principles to guide staff in their work with children, educational goals for program planning, strategies and learning experiences for implementing goals, and a set of principles to guide staff in their work with parents.

Although this book deals with complex issues, the style of the text is clear and concise. The theoretical and practical information is brought to life by the use of photographs, quotes, and examples of everyday dilemmas facing staff. This book is an ideal resource for early childhood professionals concerned with social justice and reflective practice.

Rosemary Jones
Department of Learning & Educational Development,
University of Melbourne

Under the Hill



Dependence, mutuality, and welfare reform

In 1999, the Australian Federal Government announced a review of the welfare system to find ways of 'assisting people who are disadvantaged'. An aim of the review was to 'strike a balance' between the commitment to 'maintain a strong safety net' and the 'responsibility to develop policies and strategies' to improve and enhance workforce participation for all Australians. To ensure public consultation, the Government established a reference group with representatives from the community sector, business, academia, and government, chaired by Patrick McClure, CEO of Mission Australia. It called for responses to the terms of reference and the discussion paper, *The Challenge of Welfare Dependency in the 21st Century*. The following is a summary of positions outlined in the AECA submission.

... 'Dependence' needs to be redefined in positive terms

AECA noted that Federal Government assistance is paid in a number of forms that support children and families: unemployment and parenting payments, family assistance, and payments to the sick, retired, and the disabled. AECA argued that these payments represent a community commitment to provide for all citizens, and that the current level of spending on welfare (around seven per cent of GDP) is reasonable and appropriate.

The reference group documents suggest that the Federal Government must 'reduce welfare dependency' and 'encourage self-reliance' in welfare recipients. It presents very particular views of 'welfare recipients', 'taxpayers', and 'need, dependence and independence'. 'Dependency' is treated as an unfortunate and upsetting problem, rather than something integral to society. The reference group ideas suggest that welfare recipients are all 'deficient'. AECA argues that an adequate welfare system must do more than provide a safety net for the needy and vulnerable. 'Self-reliance' cannot be measured only as being able to 'pay your own way'.

AECA is concerned that 'welfare dependence' is a phrase that denies the complexity of the challenges and problems associated with poverty and unemployment. For example, the reference group documents do not mention the global forces of economic change that have reduced employment in developed nations, or recent systemic changes in the make-up of the workforce. There are world-wide challenges in redefining workforce participation, and the nature of government support to unemployed and marginal workers, that must be tackled.

Long term strategies to prevent 'welfare dependency' must address the causes in early childhood.

AECA argued that 'dependence' needs to be redefined in positive terms. Dependence can be voluntary or involuntary, have long and short-term causes, and varying duration: marriage partners are dependent on each other, children depend on their parents and the community, and parents and older people depend on their children and successive generations. The reference group documents ignore the links of interdependence that sustain and structure human society. Humanity evolved through the medium of the clan. Human beings are interdependent—socially, emotionally, and biologically.

The reference group documents argue that support services should be available to those who need them. They ignore the fact that people enjoy social support in many forms. AECA argues that individuals receive different levels of support throughout their lives but every member of society requires adequate resources for their survival. Society must provide assistance to those whose resources are inadequate. This is our obligation as members of a mutually dependent and interdependent Australian society.

AECA is concerned about changes in public perception, promoting the idea of 'user pays'. An example of this is where those calling themselves 'childfree' argue that non-parents should not have to pay taxes for children's services they never access. The reference group documents suggest that is divided between 'them' who receive government support and 'us' who don't need it, but nevertheless have to pay. These are narrow, dangerous, and short-sighted views.

Another purpose of the welfare reform process was to investigate 'ways in which welfare arrangements can help prevent the problems that result in people needing assistance in the first place'. AECA argued that long-term

prevention of welfare dependency must include attention to early childhood. Self-reliance is a competence developed in early childhood, and the community needs to fund and support early childhood initiatives, including a range of children's services and programs to support parents.

The reference group documents state that 17 per cent of Australian children live in families without a parent in paid work. This is deeply alarming. AECA noted in its submission that children raised in poverty are subject to a range of detrimental effects, including poor educational outcomes, drug and alcohol problems, and high rates of unemployment. Family poverty is a factor in producing lower quality home environments, more frequent moves, isolation, and family instability, all of which contribute to poor development. Long-term strategies to prevent 'welfare dependency' must address the causes in early childhood and in intergenerational cycles of poverty.

... Seventeen per cent of Australian children live in families without a parent in paid work

---

The AECA submission also sought to question the approach to 'mutual obligation' taken in the paper which suggests that, in order to maintain their benefits, welfare recipients may be asked to take on educational or work opportunities. The reference group documents state that mutual obligation focuses on the abilities and potential of each individual rather than their deficiencies, and helps them to pursue 'social and economic participation'. AECA argued that individuals on income support already participate in and contribute to society. In an age of high unemployment, and one where many people are attempting to work less, it is concerning that social and economic participation is still measured in terms of full-time paid work.

This insertion of such a narrow view of mutual obligation into the welfare system is worrying, because it suggests agreement about the obligations entered into, the possibility for discussion and renegotiation, and an equal capacity to engage and disengage from the process. Welfare recipients are not equal participants in relations of mutuality with government. AECA argues that mutual obligation, as defined in the reference group document, implies that individuals on income support should be 'helped to help themselves' and that they need to be cajoled into 'self-improvement'. 'Mutual obligation' ignores the fact that many long-term welfare recipients have inadequate resources for entering into obligations with the Government. And it ignores the children who may be affected by their parents' 'negotiations'.

The reference group documents conclude by arguing that welfare reform should take place within a framework that 'maintains the Government's disciplined approach to fiscal policy'. AECA argues that the Government and the community must make choices about funding priorities: current levels of welfare spending in Australia are less than two-thirds of the average for other OECD nations. Many individuals and families, including families with children, are in desperately vulnerable social and economic circumstances. The Federal Government's disciplined approach to fiscal policy can and should be maintained without risk to these citizens.

Welfare policy and spending exist in the context of other budget commitments. Government and community attitudes to services for children, people with disabilities, the aged, etc. all impact on welfare strategies and levels of funding. Appropriately funded long-term initiatives could improve the self-reliance of the Australian population, and potentially reduce future welfare costs.

A 'disciplined approach to fiscal policy' is not synonymous with reducing spending on welfare and social policy. A disciplined and thoughtful approach to long-term government spending may even require increases in funding to education and welfare. AECA will watch the continuing welfare reform process with interest. ■

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Are you ready?

Have you registered for an Australian Business Number (ABN)?

Under the new tax system all children's services will have to register for an ABN. If a service does not have an ABN the Government will withhold 48.5% of any funds due to them.

(For more detailed information see Chapter 5 of *Children's Services and the GST—a Guide*).

What does GST Free mean?

Being GST Free simply means that you don't have to charge GST on that part of your service which is GST Free.

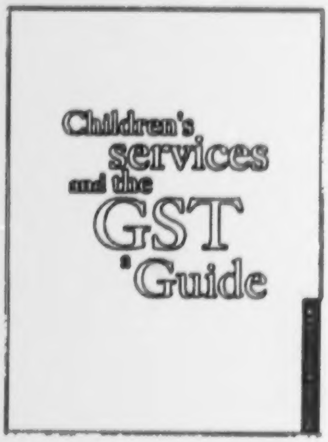
A service will have to pay, up front, the GST included on the goods and services necessary to run the service. A refund of GST paid can be claimed from the Australian Tax Office only if a service is registered for the GST.

(For more detailed information see Chapter 5 of *Children's Services and the GST—a Guide*).

What should services do?

- register for an ABN (this is a separate step from registering for the GST),
- purchase a copy of *Children's Services and the GST—a Guide* (see review on page 22 of this magazine), and
- book into a GST seminar designed especially for your services.

Contact AECA National Office on 1800 356 900 for information about the seminars and to purchase a copy of *Children's Services and the GST—a Guide*.



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AECA Viewpoint

Affordable computers and internet access

AECA has brokered an agreement with a range of industry and Government partners to offer access to affordable, high quality computers, software, internet access, and on-line support to all commonwealth and state funded children's services, including state funded preschools, mobiles, occasional, and vacation care services.

The vision

The aim is for children's services to set the standard for the effective use of the internet in business, marketing, client communication, and professional early childhood practice.

The potential for the internet to enhance efficiency in business is largely untapped, as is its potential to improve the quality of child care services.

A new computer every three years

The package will be a three-year rental agreement that can be rolled over to a new computer every three years without any residual payment. This will be advantageous to the significant number of services that can often afford the initial purchase of a new computer but are then unable to upgrade.

The proposed rental arrangement does not require a large up-front payment, but spreads payment over a period of three years. At the end of that period the computer can be updated. This keeps the hardware current, resolving the compatibility problems sometimes associated with running new software on old computers.

How the AECA offer compares with others

AECA is aware that there are other offers in the public arena, but the figures indicate that our offer will be extremely competitive. The AECA offer will include a three-year on-site warranty and on-line support.

Internet access improves communication

With internet access comes the capacity for real time, two-way communication. Used effectively, this can promote better communication and relationships between services and their clients, between early childhood professionals, between peak organisations and their constituents, and between governments and the services they fund. The internet also has real potential to reduce the isolation of services, particularly in rural and remote areas.

Doing business on-line

Services that take up this offer will be able to submit reports and other information required by the Government via the internet. Working on-line is simple and quick and will support the sector as a whole, as it allows for the easy analysis of data. This is important for policy development and program management.

Once on the internet, on-line banking and other business transactions will become possible, allowing substantial gains in administrative time. Equally, on-line communication with parents and support agencies becomes a real possibility.

Importantly, the internet can be also used to enhance a service's work with children themselves. The world wide web is a rich source of information about quality early childhood practice around the world.

Why now?

The timing of this offer is very opportune. The implementation of the GST will pose new administrative demands on all children's services. These will be costly in terms of increased administration unless new and more efficient business methods are implemented.

The Commonwealth Government's offer of a $200 GST rebate on computer hardware and/or software purchased as part of the adjustment to the GST is valid only until June 30. All children's services will be eligible for that rebate. Commonwealth funded child care services will also be entitled to a $350 grant towards the cost of implementing the new child care benefit. The AECA computer/internet project will be an approved use of that grant.

These funds can be used as a deposit for the AECA computer package. This will reduce weekly payment.

Cost and features of the package

Of the three packages available, AECA is promoting the middle level package as the best value for money. This offer will include:

- Pentium 111 or equivalent chip
- 64 megabytes of RAM
- 6 gigabytes of hard drive
- Microsoft Office
- Windows 98
- Winfax
- internet access
- three year on site warranty
- PC Anywhere

Optional extras include

- Printer
- Child care/preschool software

What will it cost?

Not more than $19.95 per week.

States of the Nation

ACT

The National Literacy Action Plan is focusing on improving the literacy and numeracy skills in the early years of schooling. The key elements are early assessment of all students by their teachers and early intervention strategies for those students identified as having difficulties.

As a result of the new Children and Young People's Act 1999, licensing for Family Day Care is being implemented. Licence conditions in the ACT have been developed in line with the Family Day Care National Standards.

The Department of Education and Community Services, in consultation with key stakeholders, will develop a Birth to Eight Early Childhood Curriculum Framework during 2000. This framework will provide broad, flexible principles to guide early childhood staff in their curriculum planning, implementation, and evaluation. It will establish common understandings of early childhood education in the ACT, and provide a developmental reporting structure for early childhood programs in child care, preschools, and the early years of school.

NSW

The NSW Department of Community Services (DOCS) recently granted $110,00 to the AECA NSW Branch for a pilot study to assess the suitability of the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) for state-funded children's services in NSW.

The pilot is now under way. Project coordinator Louise Dungate sought expressions of interest to participate in the pilot from eligible services in NSW. 22 services were selected to participate, 13 of which are located in non-metropolitan areas of NSW.

Participants in the pilot will use existing QIAS documentation from the National Childcare Accreditation Council. Staff representatives from each of the participating services will meet for a briefing, and then form accreditation committees. These will be made up of at least one representative from management, staff, and parents. Each centre will begin a self-study process across four major areas of service provision: interactions, programming, health and nutrition, and management.

Services will complete the self-study process in July. An independent reviewer will then visit the service to validate the report, and the two documents will go to a panel of moderators convened through AECA. The final stage of the pilot will involve evaluation of the project with input from the participants. This report will be submitted to DOCS in January 2001.

Louise Dungate will present a forum on the project at the Country Children's Services Association (CCSA) of NSW Conference to be held in Dubbo from June 23–25. For inquiries, please phone CCSA on (02) 4782 1470.

Northern Territory

The AECA NT Branch will soon implement the Department of Family and Community Services supplementary services scheme (SUPS). This is a funding program designed to enable a child from a target group to access short-term funding for inclusion in a service, with supportive training provided for staff. At the same time, AECA will also run the special needs subsidy scheme (SNISS) which provides longer-term support for children with high needs. Both these programs offer 'hands-on' support, inclusive practice, and policy training, as well as specialist areas of training for service staff.

The branch is also developing a library for the early childhood field as well as the wider community. The library holds an extensive collection of material covering a wide range of subjects relating to early childhood. Resources include audiocassettes, books, felt board stories, journals, newsletters, posters, puppets and videos.

Queensland

The second *Childhood in Crisis* forum, convened by the Queensland Association of State School Principals (QASSP), was held on February 17. The purpose of the forum was to continue the community debate about the changing phenomenon of childhood in a society stressed by the forces of technical change.

A leading question arising from the forum is how to ensure 'children' remain the focus of policy-makers around curriculum design and the structure and organisation of schools.

A review of the Child Care Act has begun and will include an emphasis on performance-based standards to replace the current prescriptive regulations. The new approach should encourage flexibility and allow more consideration of local factors. Guidelines are to be released shortly, with consultations planned across the state.

South Australia

The Department of Education, Training, and Employment in South Australia is developing one cohesive, manageable curriculum framework which describes the entitlement of all learners from birth to Year 12 within children's services and schools. The process of development is a leading edge, international model of working in partnership with the three educational systems in SA (state, Catholic, and independent schools).

This curriculum framework is a refinement of the curriculum frameworks currently in use (*foundation areas of learning and statements and profiles*) and incorporates current research regarding curriculum construction and how children develop and learn. It was written by a consortium

from the University of SA and Council of Education Associations of SA Inc. (CEASA).

A preliminary draft of the framework has been developed. This trial draft will be piloted in Semester 1, 2000 in intensive and satellite sites and distributed to all practitioners and stakeholders. Further consultation and calibration (conducted by external consultants) will inform the final document, to be implemented in 2001.

The Multicultural Child Care Unit Inc. (SA) (MCCU) has a *Living in Harmony* grant from the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. The grant is for a pilot project called *Let's Play Fair: A Guide to Helping Young Children Tackle Prejudice*. MCCU will use the grant to develop and promote a community education program which will provide practical ways for parents, carers, and educators to work with young children.

During 1999, a group of South Australian early childhood practitioners were involved in the *Critical Teaching* project led by Dr Glenda MacNaughton from the University of Melbourne. Through a process of critical reflection, recording of thoughts and practice, critical debate and discussion, these practitioners examined how long-held beliefs and assumptions of how children learn, what children learn, and the best ways for children to learn have advantages and disadvantages for particular children and groups of children.

The project was an initiative of the Department of Education, Training and Employment's Early Years Curriculum Unit.

Tasmania

Earlier this year, the Minister for Education, Paula Wreidt, launched the draft document *Learning Together*, a publication of proposals intended to guide education in this state into the 21st century.

The draft lists three goals for education, training, and information, with the first and most important one being 'Tasmania will have a world class education, training and information system' (p.1). The 10 key principles that include the underlying commitment of the government to equity, consultation, research, flexibility, and resources. When we remember the difficulty many early childhood teachers associated with AECA had in securing resources to maintain and enhance a rich learning environment in their centres and classrooms, this is heartening news indeed for Tasmanian teachers.

Learning Together also emphasises the need for a strong public education system. Equity of opportunity is planned through wide community consultation to develop an inclusive curriculum for all.

Victoria

Four tireless workers for the Victorian Branch (Lorna Blair, Joan Faragher, Maureen Savage, and Joan Waters) were recently awarded life membership at the AGM.

On February 26, five members of the executive met with the Minister of Human Services, Christine Campbell, to discuss AECA's *Strategy for Children's Services in Victoria: Seven Solutions*. The minister expressed her strong commitment to ensuring all children have access to affordable preschool programs with an increased allocation of funds to this part of the minister's portfolio. Other priorities for the minister include children's services regulations, roles and responsibilities of committees of management, and the establishment of a registration board for all staff working in children's services.

A number of branch members and five members of the executive attended the QIAS briefing session arranged by the Commonwealth Child Care Advisory Council. Some concern was expressed about some of the proposed changes, and the branch is now exchanging views on these changes with other branches.

On February 22 Education Minister Mary Delahunty launched the revised *Curriculum and Standards Framework*. In the early years between Prep and Year 2, the key curriculum change was for more emphasis on literacy and numeracy. The decision was based on the argument that children needed basic literacy and numeracy skills to 'learn other subjects'.

Western Australia

The West Australian Government launched *Family One*, a new business strategy which aims to enhance a positive response to families and children throughout the state. The new Family and Children's Policy Office has been established to promote action that supports and strengthens family life. A series of forums and a family consultation paper aim to encourage family-friendly business and family-focused government policies and services.

The Education Department, Meerilinga AECA, and other early childhood bodies are organising a series of quarterly forums on *The Child in the New Millennium*. The first of the public forums, entitled *Why Do Children Do That? Child Behaviour and the New Brain Research*, will be held in mid-April.

Independent schools recently decided to follow the Education Department's lead, and will introduce the new school entry age, with children turning five before June 30 eligible for the first year's primary program in 2001.

Responding to infants

What brain research has told us

Recent research into brain development and into carer-infant relationships highlights the importance of sensitive, responsive relationships to the ongoing emotional, social, and cognitive development of the child. The earliest months of life are the fastest-growing period and the time when the foundations are laid for the child's future development. There is no more important time in a child's education.

To help the development of infants, parents and carers need to provide them with opportunities to learn, and a stress-free environment in which to make the most of their learning capabilities.

Interaction—the basis for learning

The two most important elements of caring for infants are:

- sensitive interactions; and
- relationship building.

Adults need to take the time to learn to 'read' the signals of each infant in their care. Reading cues is a complex task requiring sensitivity, responsiveness, and intimate knowledge of individual infants. It means to listen and watch and reflect, and to base the care and education of the infant on this. Each carer-infant relationship is unique, and it is from the patterns of these relationships that the infant learns to make sense of the world.

Engaging the infant without stress

Interactions that cause stress to an infant will actually inhibit learning, so it is important to discover what sorts of interactions the baby is comfortable with. For example, some babies like close contact, others will wish to move about free of adult hindrance. All babies are unique individuals who will communicate their needs. Therefore it is important to respond quickly to crying, and to gradually learn what the cries of each infant mean.

It is also important to learn to respond to infants' less powerful signals.

Freya, at 10 days old, would purse her lips in a certain way when she needed to be held by her mother, even when being held by someone else. When she was given to her mother to hold, her face became peaceful again. Because this early signal was responded to, Freya began to learn that she was an active partner in the relationship—not just a passive receiver of attention. With less sensitive carers an opportunity would have been lost to help Freya begin the journey of exploring her relationship with her world and her own special place in it.

> *...The baby is an active partner in the communication process*

Signals to look for

When we tune into babies we look for non-verbal, emotionally charged signals such as:

- different cries and vocalisations;
- gaze;
- body movements (arms, legs, arching of back);
- body postures; and
- facial expressions such as smiles, eyes widening, frowns, squinting and wincing, yawning—all have meaning.

Communicating with an infant

When adults imitate the early expressions of the infant, it is part of the beginnings of mutual conversation. Some of the earliest gestures which can become 'conversations' between adult and infant may include:

- poking out the tongue;
- opening the mouth;
- making a funny face;
- smiling;
- early vocalisations, eg 'oo-oo' or soft 'boo-boo-oo'; and
- blowing raspberries

Through repeated experiences and interactions with sensitive carers, infants begin to learn how communication works. If we do not respond to infant cues, the baby will not learn that s/he is an active partner in the communication process. This is important for the infant beginning to see him/herself as an active learner and for the beginnings of literacy.

This information is intended for use in newsletters to parents, or for general use. It may be photocopied without infringement of copyright.

Source: AECA Research in Practice Series Vol. 6 No. 2 1999 *Babies: Responding Appropriately to Infants*. By Marilyn Fleer & Pam Linke.

Accolades

Churchill Fellowship Award

Lynn Christie was awarded the Family and Children's Services, Western Australia-sponsored Churchill Fellowship for 1999. The Fellowship was established in recognition of the United Nation's International Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997–2006), and is offered to people from a diverse range of disciplines. Applicants are judged on their enthusiasm and commitment, and on the quality of their proposed project—whether it will 'make a difference' within the applicant's state or territory.

Lynn has a background in early childhood teaching and is currently working for the Education Department of Western Australia as a Childhood Education Policy Officer. The Fellowship will allow her to study policy, service delivery, and educational outcomes for children and their families trapped in the poverty cycle. Her research will focus on new ways for children to access and participate in early childhood education programs, the provision of culturally appropriate curriculums, and the achievement of fair and holistic assessment and evaluation procedures.

Lynn's research program will take approximately nine weeks. It focuses on overseas initiatives and programs, and includes visits to o Los Angeles (UCLA and Pacific Oaks Training College), • Ontario (meeting with Dr Fraser Mustard), • Belgium (meeting with Professor Ferre Laevers at the Centre for Early Childhood Education and Primary Education at Leuven Catholic University), • London (Institute of Education and the Thomas Coram Research Unit at London University, the Department of Education and Employment, and the National Children's Bureau), • Corby (the Penn Green Centre for under fives and their families), • Cambridge University (meeting Professor Mary-Jane Drummond), and • Worcester University (meeting Professor Christine Pascal).

Further information about the Churchill Fellowship can be gained from the Churchill Memorial Trust on (02) 6247 8333.

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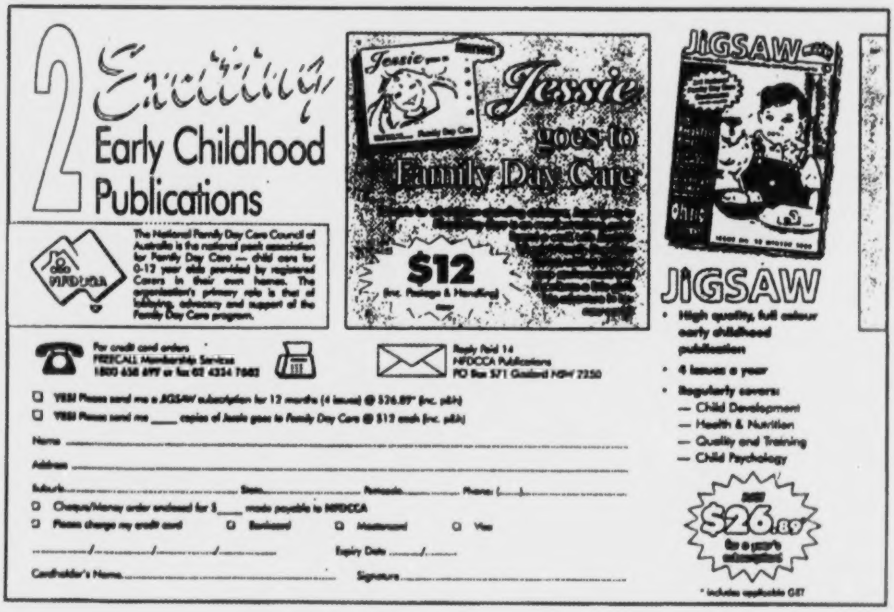

2 Exciting Early Childhood Publications

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2000
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having a party dancing

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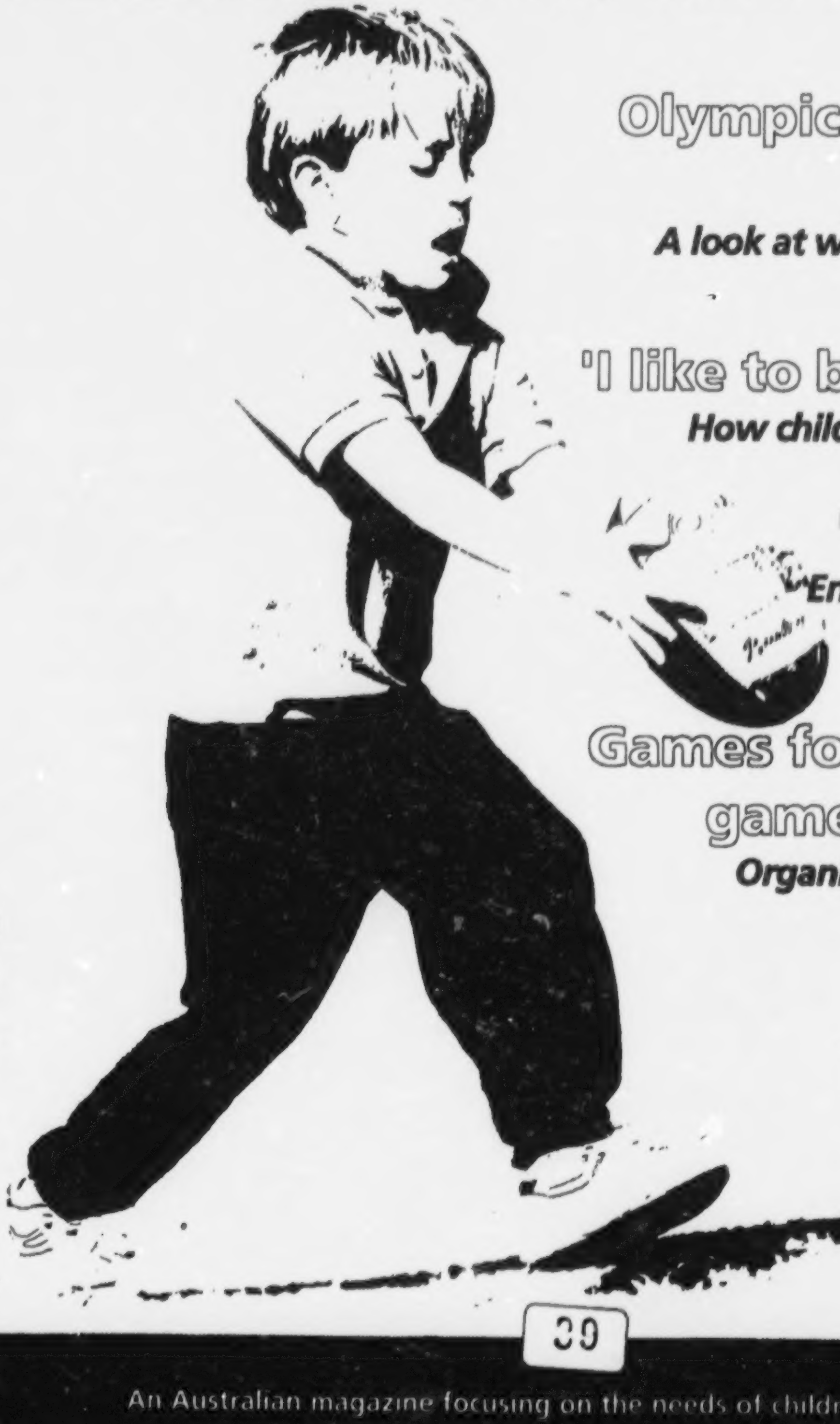

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The Australian Early Childhood Association Inc. (AECA) is a leading specialist publisher of early childhood literature. It is a national peak non-government organisation acting in the interests of young children aged 0-8, and for older children in outside school hours care. It actively promotes the provision of high quality services for all young children and their families and supports the important role of parents in caring for their children. AECA is also the national umbrella organisation for Children's Services and sees this task as supporting the advocacy role of the child care sector as a whole, without undermining the rights of each specialist organisation to operate and speak independently.

Australian Early Childhood Association, Inc.
***Every Child* Volume 6 No. 2 Winter 2000**

Play to order is no longer play

There is a current trend towards organising children's playtime, placing them into competitive sport at a younger age than ever before, and imposing rules and boundaries on their recess and play breaks. However, the games children organise and play without adult intervention—when 'allowed'—provide them with important lifelong lessons. In this issue of *Every Child*, John Evans discusses the need for a balance between free and structured play time, and the implications of involving young children in too much organised sport.

Page 4

Young children's views of Australia and Australians

In the lead-up to the 2000 Olympic Games, there is much focus on Australia's image and identity as a nation. What is it that makes us Australian? Is it the way we look, is it where we are born, is it the way we speak? In this article, Sue Dockett asks these questions of a group of children aged between five and eight years. The answers make fascinating and insightful reading.

Page 6

'Let's dance!' How to foster lifelong interest in physical activity

Dance has long been a much-loved form of self expression. There is now evidence that dance can also help children develop physical strength and stamina, as well as improved spatial, musical, and social skills. In this article, Karen Bond examines what it is that children love about dance, and discusses how early childhood educators can use dance to assist with children's development, and encourage an interest in physical activity.

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The Olympic Games: A critical look at what we teach children

Children's interests play a large part in the curriculum for early childhood education. In this article, Sally Barnes investigates whether or not activities surrounding community events such as sports and holidays constitute too much of the curriculum under the guise of 'children's interests'. In order to provide meaningful and relevant programs for children, Sally argues, the curriculum also needs to focus on the issues that really matter in young children's lives.

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Glen-Marie Frost—SOCOG

No other event can bring the world to our doorstep like the Olympic Games. Nothing compares with the excitement, energy, colour, or the festive electric atmosphere—it's not just a 16-day sporting spectacle—it's a hype of international intrigue that begins months beforehand. And a boundless reality of benefits that last for years afterwards.

The Sydney 2000 Olympic Games will leave legacies ... not just memories and images, not just bricks and mortar, but pride in our nation's achievements.

Three years ago, SOCOG embarked on an ambitious national education program reaching out to all 3.2 million school students. This was an Olympic first. No other host city has embraced the nation's youth to keep them informed on preparations for the Games so that they could feel a sense of ownership in the lead-up to the event itself.

The campaign consists of three major initiatives with supporting enhancement programs for students.

The first initiative, *O-News*, is a student newspaper (with Australia's largest circulation) that features topical Olympic news and activities. Aimed at students in Years 3–12, a total of five editions have been published giving our students sporting, cultural, environmental, and technological dimensions to their education.

The second initiative, *aspire*, is a flexible, interactive package of learning materials which encourages students and teachers to explore a variety of Olympic themes in a relevant, fun, and engaging way. From Alice Springs to Hobart, this CD-ROM-based multimedia resource is being used extensively in classrooms across the country.

Finally, the third initiative is *kids*—the official website of the National Education Program at www.olympics.com/eng/kids. The *kids* area houses fun, interactive leisure and learning activities organised into Sport, Green, World and Techno zones. *kids* also establishes interactions with *O-News* and hosts *aspire*-related projects, along with extensive sections for parents and teachers.

O-News, *aspire* and *kids* are presented by Westpac and supported by Fairfax and IBM. This support has been invaluable for the program as it has allowed an educational undertaking the size of which has never been attempted by any other host nation. Susan Crawford, manager of the National Education Program, has said 'Olympism is all about fair play, teamwork, friendship, and achievement. These Olympic ideals underpin Olympism and are the legacy we need to leave for future generations of Australians. Our Olympic 2000 National Education Program strategies have provided exciting tools to support the education of children all around this country about the spirit and the ideals of the Olympic Games.' In addition to these three key initiatives, various other enhancement programs have been developed.

> *SOCOG embarked on an educational undertaking the size of which has never been attempted by any other host nation*

For instance, school students are participating in the Olympic Welcome Program which provides a unique opportunity for 'host' NSW primary schools and their 'network' schools from all states to be linked and establish friendships with both Australian and international Olympic teams competing in the 2000 Games. It is hoped that this national network will create long-lasting friendships between primary schools and create understanding and respect for different cultures and nationalities.

Our primary students seemed to particularly enjoy being involved in the 'share the spirit' art program over the last three years. This annual competition involved primary school students from Years 1–6 across Australia creating artwork that depicted friendship, sport, environment, multiculturalism, 'welcome to Australia' or 'greeting the world'. A total of 54000 students across Australia participated in the 2000 competition alone.

Further to this, students' artwork will be used to greet the athletes of the world when they arrive at the Athletes' Village. Athletes will be able to keep this artwork as a memento of their stay in Australia and they will be encouraged to send a 'thank you' card to the student who provided the artwork.

The Olympic spirit is about inspiration, dedication, excellence, commitment, sacrifice—not only to compete but to improve. If the Sydney 2000 Games and our education program can foster these values into the minds of our youth, this will be the greatest legacy—and gift—of all.

Glen-Marie Frost
General Manager, Communications and Community Relations, SOCOG ©

HARNESSING *the Olympic spirit*

The following letter from Alison Elliott appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald on Wednesday May 3, 2000.

That many families prefer to use informal care for young children (*Herald* May 3), rather than child care centres is worrying but not surprising. With continuing concern about the poor quality care and education in some centres, the 'guilt trap' factor and the huge cost of care, child care suffers from an image problem that is difficult to counter. Indeed, I suspect Bettina Arndt (*Herald*, April 29) quoted from our 1995 study showing that early childhood teacher education students would not use child care for their children under three years of age.

But this negative perception can be changed. Legislation must ensure quality care and education programs in the preschool sector. Imagine a school being allowed to operate without university trained teachers, or clearly defined curricula and learning outcomes! Yet, child care centres are authorised to function with minimally or untrained staff, poor resources and limited documentation of learning programs and outcomes. While this is allowed, some centres, will exploit the situation.

The early years are universally recognised as being developmentally and educationally critical for children, with future academic success strongly linked to appropriate early experiences. And, while many child care centres have university qualified early childhood teachers, thoughtful curricula and good resources, others muddle along with the bare minimum of everything.

In the meantime, if the 'authorities' won't ensure quality programs and appropriate staff qualifications then parents must. Child care centre fees now rival those of the top independent schools. Spend your money wisely. Shop around. Ask to see evidence of staff qualifications, full accreditation status, and curriculum documents. If a centre doesn't stand up to scrutiny take your money (and your child) elsewhere.

Alison Elliott (Dr)
Chair, School of Learning,
Development and Early Education
University of Western Sydney

It would be impossible to miss the hype, controversy, and scandals surrounding the Olympics to be held later this year. Millions of dollars have been spent to ensure that Sydney hosts the best Olympic Games ever. Millions are spent by each of the participating countries to prepare and support their teams. Millions more will be spent by the media contingents coming to Sydney so that audiences around the globe can touch the Olympics from their lounge rooms.

> *Aren't the 'Olympic spirit' and ideals something that should be an integral part of our teaching anyway?*

Additionally, vast amounts of money have been spent in the hope that Australians all over the country will share the 'Olympic experience'. And, of course, the Olympics present huge marketing opportunities for business. Open a popular magazine or newspaper, look at the labels on your favourite products, watch TV, and you're bombarded by Olympic promotions—ticket offers, swap cards, memorabilia, competitions, and the like.

With saturation coverage on TV, and schools and early childhood settings gearing up for their Olympic experiences, could there be a child anywhere who is not aware of the Olympics?

But wait … how interested *are* young children in the Olympics and similar popular events? Sally Barnes in her article *The Olympic Games: A critical look at what we teach children*, suggests that over-emphases on the Olympic Games do not contribute to children's needs or interests.

How many children and families will actually share the true meaning of the Olympic spirit? Will it become blurred or totally lost with the commercialism of the moment? And aren't the 'Olympic spirit' and ideals something that should be an integral part of our teaching anyway?

How many children exercise enough to even begin to imagine the rigours of physical activity and psychological dedication required of an elite athlete?

The US-based *Centre for Disease Control and Prevention* estimates that less than half of all children do any regular physical exercise. Australian experts are similarly concerned about children's sedentary lives.

Today, even young children's exercise is limited as parents drive them to school and recreation activities and restrict their outdoor roaming. At the same time, they spend large amounts of physically inactive time glued to TV, videos, computers, and hand-held game machines.

The weekly baby gym class can't compensate for this prolonged inactivity.

More sedentary lifestyles—coupled with high energy and fast food diets—mean that childhood obesity is a growing problem in first world countries. The World Health Organisation has identified obesity as one of the major health problems to be tackled this century.

Perhaps in our lead-up to the Olympics a focus on living and eating like an athlete could be part of the 'Olympic experience'.

As we settle into the new century, we can be assured that food and technology will become even 'faster'. More accessible and engaging information technology means even greater opportunity for inactivity. High-fat fast foods are here to stay, and saturation advertising at prime viewing time means that children demand food choices promoted on TV.

Clearly, early childhood education has a role to play in promoting more healthy lifestyles for children. But in the face of pervasive social trends and advertising this is not easy.

As several of our writers in this issue of *Every Child* suggest—harnessing the Olympic spirit to encourage active play and regular physical activity, and to promote healthy food choices and lifestyles, might be the best way of ensuring that children share the Olympic experience.

Alison Elliott

PLAY to ORDER *is no longer play*

'Sport and recreational activities are of great importance in today's society, but organized activities cannot without serious consequences replace free and creative play, where children exercise their own initiative.' This was written by Arvid Bengtsson (1979, p.450) more than 20 years ago, but it is just as applicable today as it was then, perhaps even more so. Organised activities, both in and outside school, are replacing free and creative play in ways which should concern everyone interested in the growth and development of children.

We have lost the balance between free and organised time

Organised competitive sport is one of the most popular pastimes for children outside school hours, and there is plenty of evidence to show they are participating at a younger and younger age. Not so long ago the first opportunity for a youngster to participate in under-age sport was late primary, even early secondary, school. Prior to this the child had probably spent a good deal of time honing his or her skills with friends in the backyard at home, in the street game, and in the playground during school recess. With this experience behind them, children entered sport with a reasonable grasp of the skills and knowledge required to play the game. What was also important, but usually overlooked, was that the games they organised and played in the street and playground served as important learning experiences in themselves.

As Huizinga (1955) reminded us, 'play to order is no longer play'. In sport, children 'play to order' in the sense that their participation (what they wear, when and where they play, the rules of competition, etc.) is totally controlled by adults. Children are often 'pawns' in the hands of adults who manage the game as if it was a major event and who measure their own performance as a coach by the number of wins achieved by the team.

By contrast, in games children devise and play themselves *they* create the rules, choose the teams, and take responsibility for maintaining the game action. If one person or team is dominating the game, they change the rules. It might well involve a good deal of negotiation and compromise but, as Coakley's (1984) studies have shown, their quest for a 'fair' game overrides the needs and interests of individual players. What is most important is that the process of game construction provides children with a unique opportunity to learn and practise the social skills that are needed in peer settings. Children who are constantly placed in settings where adults are responsible for organising the activities are deprived of opportunities to make decisions and take responsibility for their own actions.

Today we see children as young as five and six years participating in sporting competitions on weekend mornings and weekday evenings. In sports such as swimming and gymnastics, we see children even younger involved in quite extensive training programs. The 'athletic snowball', as it has been referred to, is well and truly on a roll here in Australia as in other parts of the world.

Sport is simply one of the many adult-organised activities in which children now participate outside school hours and many people, like myself, are concerned that such activities might now be occupying time which children previously devoted to free and creative play. Without wanting to overstate the issue, there is some cause for concern that children's free time is being eroded to the point where one might reasonably ask the question 'when do the children play?'

We still have to confront the popular view that play is time wasted

For many youngsters the school playground at recess has been the one place where they have the opportunity to mix freely with other children and play with and on equipment not otherwise accessible to them. Recent research (Evans, 1997) suggests, however, that, even in this once sacred time in the school day, children are being given fewer opportunities to construct their own play.

Schools are increasingly being held accountable for the safety of children, and teachers are under pressure to meet specified learning outcomes. Together these imperatives have led to changes in the structure and organisation of recess. Many primary schools, for example, have cut afternoon recess, shortened the lunch break, and introduced rules which more clearly define and limit what, where, when, and with whom children can and cannot play. Larger schools have segregated playgrounds, which effectively precludes mixed age and gender play, and trees and shrubs—in which children once used to play secret games or build cubbies—are now being made off-limits. Equipment and materials which children can move (e.g. swings), build (e.g. cubbies), and manipulate (e.g. sand, water, soil) have been withdrawn because they don't conform to safety standards or have been found to be the cause of accidents and disputes.

Teachers are now required to be much more vigilant when supervising the playground and are actively discouraged from playing with the children while they are 'on duty'. There have even been cases of schools—concerned about the apparent inability of children to occupy themselves during playtime—that have organised games for them to play during lunch times. I recently heard of one school which brought in an adult to teach the children to play marbles and hopscotch!

It is a disturbing sign of the times to hear teachers say that children are finding it difficult to occupy themselves for any more than 30 minutes out in the playground. But then again perhaps we should not be surprised when we insist on filling their time outside school hours with organised activities such as sport. Despite our many attempts to educate people about the importance of play, it is still misunderstood and devalued. We still have to confront the popular view that play is time wasted, and that such time would be better spent in some form of adult-organised activity. It worries me, for example, that few objections have been raised to the reduction of playtimes in schools and to the restrictions placed on children's choice of activities. From America and England we hear of primary schools that no longer have any recess. In these schools physical education and sport have become the de facto breaks and provide children with brief periods of activity before they are directed to return to class. The whole school day is rigidly scheduled and carefully supervised. This is not a situation we want to emulate.

There is nothing wrong with adult-organised activities, but children need time to themselves. We have lost the balance between free and organised time. We underestimate the value of play and we overestimate the importance of organised activities. The challenge for us all is to encourage everyone working with children to understand that 'play to order is not play'. Sport is not play. Organised activities at recess are not play. Nor should we even think of them as a substitute for play. The involvement of the child and the learning outcomes are quite different in each setting. Play of the child's own making is vitally important—we must resist the temptation to organise every moment of their lives.

John Evans
Deakin University, Vic

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Time to play

- Children who have time to themselves, time to play, imagine and fantasise, have the best opportunity to engage in life in the way that children need to (p.11).
- Sometimes children are pushed and rushed into activities before they are ready for them and before they have the necessary basic skills (p.89).
- What kids need for play:
  - A soft toy or doll to talk to, complain to, confide in, read a story to …
  - A cardboard box that can be a hiding place, a train carriage, a boat, a plane, a car, a cubby house …
  - Unstructured materials like clay and sand and water.
  - Structured things like puzzles, blocks, and board games.
  - Bits and pieces for imaginary play like dress-up clothes and hats, pieces of fabric.
  - Safe areas that are comfortable to play in (p.193).
- … Unstructured, unlimited play has its own secret language. When children are given the freedom to play in this way, they usually have no goals in mind and the playing is an end in itself. By creating a world they can understand and master, children make sense of the world they live in. If adults interfere, even with the best of intentions, they inadvertently inhibit what is a natural and necessary process (p.13).

Extracts taken with the publisher's permission from *When Will the Children Play* by Angela Rossmanith.
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YOUNG CHILDREN'S VIEWS

of Australia and Australians

In recent times, there have been many media reports about Australian identity and nationality. Last year (1999) saw a great discussion about the proposed republic and the suggested changes to the preamble of the Constitution. There were also calls to have an 'Australian cultural event' to open the Olympics in Sydney. As the Olympic Games become a reality, it is expected that there will be an increasing focus on the performance of Australians, the presentation of Australia to the rest of the world, and calls to support Australia and Australians in their endeavours.

What do young children make of all this? What sense do they make of being Australian, or not being Australian? Is it important to them? National identity is usually perceived as an abstract concept, based on a sense of belonging to a community or nation. Often there is an expectation that young children do not understand such abstract notions.

As part of a larger study, a group of children shared their views about Australia and Australians. These children were aged between five and eight years, in years K–2 at a suburban Sydney school. The school population had a rich and diverse mix of cultural backgrounds. Talking about issues of national identity was of interest to these children.

'Australia is the best country in the world,' said Rachel. Crystal said, 'It's a beautiful country,' and Reuben said he liked Australia because 'It's a good place to live. There is a lot of good people.'

Most of the children identified themselves as Australian. However, some described their dual nationality. Ruth said she was Australian, but also commented 'I'm kind of both; I'm Lebanese and Australian ... my background is Lebanese,' noting that her mother came from Lebanon. There was an awareness that many different people were Australians, with Celia commenting, 'My friend is Australian, but her face is Chinese, but she is still Australian ... she speaks like an Australian.'

For these children, being born in Australia, or learning how to 'speak Australian' were the keys to being Australian. Other characteristics provoked discussion among the children. Clearly, they were aware of skin colour and race as factors. Of interest was the way the discussions developed, with some children questioning the statements of others, drawing on their own experiences to challenge some stereotypical views.

Rhonda:	*[You know somebody is Australian] if they were born in Australia.*
Crystal:	*If you speak Australian.*
Phillipa:	*Sometimes you can tell by their face … Maybe a white coloured skin.*
Interviewer:	*What if they had a dark coloured skin, could they be Australian then?*
Rhonda:	*It doesn't matter about their skin. That's because my Dad is from Lebanon and my Mum was born in Australia.*

Some children recognised that a change in nationality was possible. Neil thought this was rather easily achieved by moving: 'If you are in Australia and you don't want to be Australian, you could go to another country.' Some of his peers were not convinced it was this easy. Jake was adamant that nationality could not be changed, because nationality depended on where you had been born and '... Once you've been born, you can't change it.'

There is an expectation that young children do not understand such abstract notions [as national identity]

We asked if there was anything special about being Australian. Neil thought for a while before commenting that 'there is something special about all the countries'. Gemma agreed and explained:

> *… If you are born in Australia and that is the country you are born in and you think it's the best country … but it's not really the best country because everybody thinks their country is the best country because they live in that country … I like [Australia] because it's the country I live in, and if I lived in another country, then I would like that.*

Other children said Australia was special because 'people felt free; there is no dangerous things like torpedoes or war; no bad things happen; and you know lots of people.'

Some groups of children discussed whether or not it was important to be Australian. Rhonda referred to an abstract feeling: 'I like to be Australian, because I just love it and I just like it for some reason'; and Phillipa noted her familiarity with Australia: 'I was born here. I don't want to leave. I've been here for too long and I'm used to it.' Several other children said it was not important to be Australian, with Jenny and Neil explaining that 'You don't have to be Australian if you don't want to be.' Rachel summed up her views by saying:

> *If you want Australia to be important then you can have it important to yourself, but if you don't want it to be special then you just say it to yourself.*

These children were aware of a number of features that made them, or their peers, Australian. For most of them, *speaking Australian* was the key to being Australian. Some happily identified themselves as half-Australian, because they—or their

parents—had been born in another country. There was no apparent problem attached to having a dual nationality.

Sometimes, skin colour was mentioned as a feature of being Australian. However, there was also regular rebuttal of reliance on skin colour as a determinant of Australian identity, often accompanied by children's reference to people they knew, or even themselves and their own non-white skin colour, as well as their identification with Australia.

These children were aware of their own national identity, whether it was Australian, Lebanese, Italian, or some combination of these. Despite this, national identity did not seem to have a predominant role in their lives. Neil's comment that *there's something special about all countries* reflects an expectation and acceptance of diverse identities, a view that may well be prompted by his presence in a strong and supportive multicultural school community. It seems very clear that the community in which these children live influences their identity and their ability to consider and compare this.

These children engaged in discussions about diversity, acceptance, and tolerance with eagerness and enthusiasm. They did not shy away from issues of race or skin colour. Nor did they trot out clichés. They showed a genuine interest in discussing relevant issues. In educational terms, it would seem a most appropriate time to promote further discussions of identity, relationships with others, and the relevant roles and responsibilities of both local and global citizens.

Early childhood educators can encourage these discussions in several ways. For example, when children talk about the Olympics, encourage them to think not only about Australians but also athletes of other nationalities and how they are represented. Issues of gender can also be discussed as men and women compete in different events. Use children's questions and observations to explore issues of belonging, community, and citizenship. Don't avoid discussions of race and ethnicity in the belief that young children are not aware of differences or that this encourages a focus on difference. Young children are aware of differences and, provided discussions occur in a respectful and meaningful context, they are interested in exploring these. Discussion with sensitive adults can broaden understandings and challenge stereotypical views.

Sue Dockett
University of Western Sydney, Macarthur

More details of this study can be found in:

Dockett, S., Woods, L., Cusack, M. & Perry, B. (2000) Young children's views of Australia and Australians. Paper presented at the *Australian Research in Early Childhood Education Conference*, Canberra, January.

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'Let's dance!'

How to foster lifelong interest in physical activity

In considering the topic for this article, suggested by *Every Child*, I began to reflect on how difficult it is to foster a lifelong interest in 'the physical'. Centuries of ideology are against us. Since long before the so-called Age of Reason separated mind from body several centuries ago, 'the physical' has held a relatively low status in our western value system. This continues today, unless there is competition involved, and particularly when physicality is associated with 'the arts.' Mind/body dualism has flourished during the 20th century, with major theorists such as Piaget and Freud describing hierarchies of human development in which children and artists are situated at the bottom as beings of immature intelligence and large egos. As we enter the 21st century with its technological hyperdrive, some are foreshadowing an extreme scenario in which technology becomes equated with annihilation of the body. Who needs a body in a virtual world?

> *If anything can stimulate an enduring commitment to 'the physical,' surely it is dance*

In spite of such obstacles, I remain committed to the importance of including 'the body' in learning and in living a full life. This article will address the topic through a focus on dance, a form of physical activity I have practised since early childhood, and as an adult have spent more than two decades teaching and researching in Australian higher education. If anything can stimulate an enduring commitment to 'the physical,' surely it is dance. This proposition is based not only on my own lifelong passion for dance, but on extensive experience (dancing, observing, teaching, talking) with children.

As a children's dance teacher and teacher educator in the mid-1970s, I came to a conscious decision that children knew more about moving and dancing than I did. I was starting to fear that I might lose the dance that 'moved me' as a child. I remembered dance as being full of feelings, images, personal stories, contagious rhythms, music, social excitement, and counting. (In the 14th century St. Augustine described dance as a form of mathematics, an insight that might benefit maths teachers today.) My childhood experience was also about making up and memorising dances that I could perform for willing observers. I saw all these phenomena in my young students and wanted to affirm them. I reasoned that if I 'spoke' their language, which in the early years is predominantly non-verbal (evidence the popularity of Pokemon), children would learn better.

In the '80s my thinking took a biological turn. Doctoral research with young, non-verbal deaf-blind children convinced me that humans must be 'wired for dance' These children, with multiple impairments of vision, hearing, motor function and general health, and little interest in socialising, showed an affinity for dancing. They blossomed within a dance program that was receptive to each child's personal style, drew on their own unique gestures, rhythms, and spatial behaviours, and met them one-to-one and as part of a group process. I began to embrace the notion that humans have evolved to have dance and other arts as part of our birthright. As Ellen Dissanayake (1999) asserts, 'I think it is not too much to say that we were designed as a species to satisfy our needs for identity, belonging, meaning, and personal competence through the arts.'

I have participated in many child-centred dance education programs where I have watched unfit children develop strength and stamina, shy children become more expressive, bored children become enthusiastic about school, and mixed language groups integrate socially. I have witnessed children's gender stereotypes dissolve into cooperative group performance and dance-based learning that encompasses language, maths, science, and other arts (Bond & Deans, 1997). In Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner's terms, dance engages 'multiple intelligences' (Gardner, 1993). While 'bodily-kinesthetic' intelligence is highlighted in dance (it is also important for surgeons), other capacities are also involved, e.g. spatial, linguistic, mathematical, musical, social, and intrapersonal.

The most potent justifications for dance come from children themselves:

> *My neck, my shoulders, my body and the tape deck. Just me ... my shoulders, my hands, my toes ... me. I have feathers on dancing, and the radio is on. I am flapping my wings, there is grass on the wall. This is my whole self dancing.* (Preschool, Australia.)

Dance was freedom. It was all big and you could move around. It was a home away from home you could say, to me, 'cause I felt real good when I was there. (Primary school, USA.)

We hop around … I am good. I like the noodle twist. I like opening and closing. I like high is all around. Let's dance! (Primary special school, Saipan.)

I loved it more than anything else. I felt like I could really be what I could be. (Middle school, USA.)

Dance … promotes you, excels you, cares for you and teaches you all so simply yet so complex … We are not alone as we teach the professors, teachers and experts what we hold inside and to love dance as we do so no-one will be alone. (International children's dance festival, USA.)

I selected the above quotes for their affective content, motivation being a likely key to lifelong interest. Experiences of wholeness, self-esteem, freedom, 'true self', commitment, and optimism are widely reported by young people in dance education settings (Bond & Stinson, 2000). Children also have a lot to say about learning, achievement, teaching, and relationships (to people and the environment) in dance. The force of accumulated evidence is so strong that I will probably never understand why dance doesn't have equal standing with language, maths, and science in educational curriculum. Perhaps dance is considered to be too much fun (a word children use often in relation to dance) for a society that tends to distrust pleasure and the body (it's okay to compete with 'the body', as in sport, but …). I like to remind people that dance has existed as a formal teaching discipline since at least classical Greece. Plato saw it as a form of moral education.

I conclude with an insightful 'child-centred' observation from the Rev. John Blake, author (1850) of *The Farmer's Every-Day Book* (Kraus, 1969, p.125):

> *In the middle of the day … let half an hour be spent in this fascinating exercise, as a reward of good conduct as scholars, and the prediction is made with confidence, that neither girls or boys will ever be tardy.*

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Some recommendations

Early childhood services can promote lifelong interest in physical activity by encouraging parents and school councils to take seriously the educational potential of dance, which can:

- **support research that illuminates the connections between dance, literacy, numeracy and other learning areas, and dance's value in the construction of self-knowledge and social relationships, including altruism;**
- **support the development of partnerships between arts professionals and educators to provide high quality dance-based programs in schools; and**
- **promote a renaissance of dance in the training of early childhood and primary professionals—the arts education downsizing project of the '90s has gone too far. Dance education has been hit particularly hard, with the closure of degree and diploma programs in four states.**

Most importantly, we can all listen more carefully to the viewpoints of children, who, in my experience, are astute commentators on what makes life and education worthwhile (often we have to listen nonverbally). Highly active children, in particular, can advise us on how to promote lifelong interest in 'the physical'.

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The Olympic Games

A critical look at what we teach children

Early childhood educators have long sought to develop meaningful programs based on the interests of young children, and the inclusion of significant community events has been recognised as an appropriate way to do this. In practice, this has seen events such as the Royal Easter Show or the Christmas Pageant (in South Australia) being given prominence in program planning, with children subsequently being engaged in a range of experiences and activities based on these events.

The Grand Prix experience

My own interest in the use of significant community events for curriculum content stems from the late 1980s, when Adelaide was the host of the Formula One Grand Prix. Children were encouraged to take along big boxes to kindergarten or child care with which to make a racing car, to run around chalked-out racing tracks (usually while wearing their 'car') and to make chequered flags. 'Grand-prix-a-thons' became important annual fundraising events, and special family days were held in centres to celebrate this special occasion.

The emphasis on the Grand Prix intrigued me for many reasons, but none more so than the degree of the emphasis given to this event within the program. When I asked people what had led them to their curriculum focus, the emphasis was invariably hidden under the guise of 'children's interests'. This puzzled me, since none of the children I worked with seemed to have any real interest in the Grand Prix. I found myself wondering if the children's interests were in fact the adults' interests, whether the emphasis on the event simply provided content with which to fill children's time, and whether or not the types of experiences provided were really worthwhile. The question of whose needs were really being met in the Grand Prix programs seemed to be critical. Interestingly, when the Grand Prix left Adelaide, so did its emphasis in early childhood programs here!

Repeating the past?

Like the Grand Prix, the Olympic Games, to be held later this year, are a significant community event, only this time on a grander and national scale. And, like many Australians, I'm quite looking forward to them. But whether or not they will take precedence in my kindergarten program is a different story.

Television advertisements tell me daily about the 'Olympic ideals' that schools around Australia are building in their students. These ideals—achieving your individual best, teamwork, providing collective support, etc.—appeal to me too and seem to be highly appropriate for children. But other aspects of the Olympics, many of which contradict those ideals, concern me. For example, there is a heavy emphasis on winning (we all know the names of the athletes likely to win a medal, but do we know the names of other athletes preparing to do their 'personal best'?) and a strong bias in the press towards those who compete in the 'favoured' sports of swimming and athletics. Athletes competing in the Paralympics are almost invisible (how many of us could name five of them?). And, in addition to the question of '*In whose interest would an emphasis upon the Olympic Games be?*', there are other issues that lead me to question the appropriateness of the Olympic Games in my kindergarten program. These include the alleged removal of homeless people from inner suburban areas of Sydney, the clean-up of Redfern (why now?), the numerous scandals that have 'rocked' the lead-up to the Games, the cost of tickets, the rampant commercialism, and the professionalisation of athletics in western countries, to name a few.

> *[Are] the children's interests in fact the adult's interests?*

The early childhood curriculum: Who decides?

Deciding just what should form the content of the curriculum in early childhood education has been widely debated (Kessler & Swadener, 1992) and, unlike most other areas of education, there is rarely a syllabus of content that drives the curriculum for children under the age of five. In the early years, the responsibility for determining curriculum content usually rests with the early childhood educator, who must make decisions about what to teach, how to teach, and the appropriateness or otherwise of the topic. These decisions are influenced not only by the theoretical foundations of our work but also by the individual values and attitudes held by each educator.

Jonathon Silin has argued that, too often, the early childhood curriculum has been filled with endless activities linked to festivals, the seasons, and holidays, and he suggests that 'too much of the contemporary curriculum brings a deathly silence to the being of childhood and not enough of it speaks to the things that really matter in children's lives or in the lives of those who care for them' (Silin, 1995, p.40). It seems to me that an overemphasis on the Olympic Games, like the overemphasis on the Grand Prix, risks exactly this.

Finding the curriculum in children's voices

In supporting the call for a more relevant and responsive curriculum for young children, I want to recount an incident that happened at the kindergarten in which I work. At the end of the morning session, I had gathered together about 14 children for a final group-time. As I was reading a story to them, I noticed Anthony wriggling around at the back of the mat, annoying some of the children. Usually we would break up into two groups for a story, but on this occasion my co-worker was busy talking with a parent. In order to manage the group, I asked Anthony to come and sit closer to me but, as I did, Lawrence said very loudly and emphatically, 'No, I don't want him to sit here. He smells'. I stopped reading the book, and we talked at length about his concerns. Later, Lawrence's mother talked with me about him making this same statement at home. And then Zak's mother shared the same story with me.

In reflecting upon Silin's thoughts about curriculum that truly addresses the things that matter in children's lives, it strikes me that this is one such incident. And, in the final analysis, if I teach the children nothing about the Olympic Games, what is the outcome that I risk? But if I fail to address Lawrence and Zak's concerns, what are the potential outcomes for them and all of the other children with whom I work?

Ideals about team work, collective support, and individual achievement do not simply belong to the Olympic Games, and early childhood programs that are meaningful and relevant do not need to be built from activities and experiences designed to fill children's time. If we look closely and listen carefully, we will find that the content of the curriculum is with us constantly, and if we take seriously the things that truly matter in children's lives and connect more fully with the daily interactions that occur in our centres, then we may find that we are all transformed by the experience.

Sally Barnes
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Harnessing the Olympic spirit

The Olympic Games have captured the attention of Australians unlike any other sporting or cultural event in memory.

Media coverage both positive and negative, means that even the youngest children know about 'the Games'.

Kindergarten teacher Kate Rosewarn from Canberra says that children in her class are genuinely interested in the Olympics. While the Olympics are not a major feature of her curriculum, she believes that capturing the 'big ideas' behind the games, and especially the focus on cooperation, tolerance, and global harmony is important.

Further, the Games provide a context to highlight the physical skills, personal qualities, and team work that enable individuals to achieve elite athlete status.

The arrival of the Olympic torch in Australia provided a first tangible Olympic event for Kate to highlight. The media publicity surrounding its arrival in Darwin ensured children were well aware of the event.

Children in Kate's classroom are now tracking the torch's journey around the country on a large map, identifying key towns, rivers, and special features such as Uluru, and focusing on 'big ideas', such as relationships between Aboriginal people and the land, and tolerance and harmony between all people. Other classroom activities focusing on 'big ideas' behind the games are planned for the lead-up to the Olympics and during the Paralympics.

Many people remember the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne as a major event in their lives. Those who attended the games as children remember it as a highlight of their childhood, says Kate. While children today are more familiar with large-scale sporting events, although not necessarily first-hand, the tradition, spirit, and scale of the Games makes it a unique experience. 'It would be a disservice to children not to highlight this major event,' Kate adds.

With the Olympics now such a major commercial and media event, there is a danger that the spirit of the games will be lost amidst the scandals, commercialism, and media hype. Early childhood education can play a key role in highlighting the ideals that have driven the games since ancient times. Harnessing the 'spirit' meaningfully requires some thought, but focusing on 'big ideas' about team work, personal goals and achievements, intercultural understandings, tolerance and acceptance, and celebration of diversity and excellence can make a special contribution to children's approaches to learning and to life.

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SPORT and Child Care

Each weekend throughout the country Australians take their children to sporting events, either to participate or to watch. Sporting culture is very important to Australians, and the participation in a broad range of sporting activities has always been encouraged for the physical and emotional development of children.

In 1991 it was estimated that there were one million sporting injuries in Australia, 200,000 of which were serious. These injuries cost Australians more than $1 billion annually.

> *[When a child is injured] it is important that child care staff understand what to do*

One in 17 Australians suffer from some form of sports-related injury every year. Sport health journals constantly report that children regularly suffer sport injuries, and each week newspapers carry stories of children who have been in some sporting accident.

The question is, how do we balance the need for healthy sport with concern for the risks involved? There is no suggestion that we should stop or limit the participation of children in sport. However, we do know that the main responsibility for the primary prevention of sports-related injuries falls on the shoulders of the supervising adult. This person may be the supervisor or the coach who is training them in technique. In the child care environment it is the teacher or the carer. In the home it is the parent.

There is a genuine need for people to understand that common sense goes a long way to avoiding risk. We do know that the injury rate in children doubles between the ages of 12 and 14. There is often a problem here with chronic over-training in relation to gifted child athletes. In younger children injuries are more likely to be caused by over-enthusiastic participation combined with still-developing coordination and sporting skills.

Experts in the field believe that 30 to 50 per cent of all sport-related injuries are preventable. In general, many children suffer injuries simply through the inexperience, ignorance, or over-zealousness of the people who are supervising them. One of the biggest contributors to injuries arising from sport is the condition of the facilities. They are often poor and not constructed specifically for children.

Within child care centres it is important that all sporting activities are supervised, and that physical activities are appropriate for the age of the children who are participating. Games and any organised sport should anticipate that there can be problems arising from different levels of coordination and variations in size and growth rates of the children. It is also important that sports activities are not necessarily organised along age differences—children should be supervised according to size or development level. This is very important where there is any form of locomotion or physical contact involved where children can accidentally knock each other over.

Almost any physical activity can give rise to damage to teeth, mouth, or the face, although there are some activities where there is obviously going to be a higher incident of sprains and even breaks. In the child care environment, where the very young can sustain dental and facial damage, it is important that child care staff understand what to do in circumstances where a child may knock a tooth, or what treatment is necessary in terms of controlling airways or bleeding. Extent of damage to teeth as a direct blow can vary from no displacement to complete loss of the tooth. If the tooth has been traumatised with no loss of tooth substance it still can cause damage to the nerve and blood supply. In very young children, milk teeth which have been displaced usually require little treatment, unless they were interfering with the child's bite or they become infected. It is worth warning parents that the second tooth may be damaged and recommend that in their circumstances the child seek dental referral.

As you all know, play activities—especially sports—are fun, but precautions and common sense are necessary.

Marianne Robinson
Compliance Consultant

Tackling CHILDHOOD OBESITY

Childhood obesity has increased dramatically since the 1960s. Some 20 per cent of school-age children are overweight and, according to experts, are at risk of developing a range of medical and psychological problems.

Childhood obesity is a result of several contributing factors. Certainly, heredity has some effect (Stunkard et al., 1990), but more influential seems to be lack of exercise coupled with eating high-fat, sugar, and salt foods.

Obesity is defined as an excess of body fat and is measured by skinfold thickness. A child considered obese weighs 25 per cent more than the recommended weight for height and age.

> *... Overweight children are at risk of high blood pressure, heart, liver, and kidney disease*

The importance of environmental factors in childhood obesity is well documented. Poor knowledge of nutrition, eating high-fat foods, and inactivity all appear to contribute to this problem. Family stress and anxiety can also prompt some children to overeat. It's known, too, that children from low-income families are more likely to be obese than those from affluent families (Lovelace, 1993; Stunkard & Sorenson, 1993).

American researchers Fisher and Birch (1995) found that overweight preschoolers eat a lot of high-fat foods and that their parents tended to be overweight. Not surprisingly, parents' nutritional knowledge and food choices play a key role in children's diets. As Lovelace (1993) has also demonstrated, overweight mothers tend to have overweight children.

Other researchers have shown that children of active parents are more active than other children, and that children who eat healthily are likely to come from families with good nutritional habits (Poest et al., 1990).

Researchers have also noted that families of overweight children often use food as a reward. The danger here is that high kilojoule foods become associated with acceptance, comfort, and warmth (Birch & Fisher, 1995).

Children's increasingly sedentary lifestyles are a major cause of obesity. Overweight children tend to watch a lot of television and are physically less active than normal-weight peers.

The US-based *Centre for Disease Control and Prevention* estimates that less than half of all American children do regular physical exercise. Australian experts are similarly concerned that children's sedentary lives lead to weight gain and obesity.

Today, young children's exercise is limited as parents drive them to school and recreation activities and restrict their outdoor play and roaming for safety reasons. Often now, rather than play outside, children watch TV, play video games and surf the Internet after school and on weekends. Worse still, inactivity and snacking go hand in hand. And while watching television children are bombarded with advertising promoting high-sugar and high-fat foods.

While obesity is not immediately life-threatening, overweight children are at risk of high blood pressure and heart, liver, and kidney disease. Recently there has been an increase in premature onset of obesity-related Type II diabetes.

Equally important are the psychological problems associated with being overweight. While not desirable, the reality is that physical attractiveness is a strong predictor of social acceptance. Overweight children tend to be less well accepted by peers, and feelings of alienation can lead to poor self-esteem, depression, and behaviour problems. These, in turn, can lead to further overeating to compensate for a general unhappiness (Banis et al., 1988).

The World Health Organisation has identified childhood obesity as one of the major health problems to be tackled by first world countries this decade. And experts agree that childhood obesity can be contained. But how?

Educators and parents can make a difference. Working with families in a coordinated way to promote good nutrition, fitness, and healthy lifestyles is a first step.

At the program level, educational policies and practices must promote active lifestyles and physical activities. Young children need opportunities for exercise, sports sessions, and active outdoor (or indoor) play on a daily basis that involves large muscles. At least 30 minutes of active exercise per day is recommended (Summerfield, 1997).

AE

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The CHAMPION WITHIN

Inclusive practices in activity programs

As the 2000 Olympics approaches, it's easy to focus on the efforts of those heralded as champions. And, indeed, these people who have achieved greatness in sport are role models for everyone, including children and their carers. An offshoot of 'Olympic fever' may be children's increased interest and involvement in active play experiences, as they dramatise achieving excellence in physical ability and challenge themselves to further heights. All children must be given such opportunities to experience the 'champion' within them.

> *All children must be given opportunities to experience the 'champion' within*

In Australia, we have several documents to guide our underlying ethics and values in providing early childhood education. The AECA Code of Ethics, the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, and the Quality Improvement and Accreditation Scheme all address the concepts of non-discrimination, children's right to play, and access to programs that support their full development. The concepts and the guidelines for practice are clear. However, for inclusive education (IE) to be successful in practice, we need more than rhetoric; we need commitment in beliefs and action.

IE ultimately involves belief systems that reflect real valuing of individuals and human potential. Difference is respected and valued. Recognition of achieving personal goals in a social context is acknowledged. It involves teachers and carers being aware of their ethical responsibility to follow through with the concept to its maximum value in all program areas, including that of physical activity.

Woodrow (1996) suggests that early childhood workers need to question the ethical dimensions of curriculum and practice. She asks, 'Are our goals aimed at reproducing the status quo or are they about a "growing society" that is more equitable, compassionate and tolerant?' Discussion regarding goals for physically active play programs that include children with disabilities needs to be on the agenda. Activity for children with disabilities should be considered as more than therapy—it is an absolute right to 'play actively with others' for health, wellbeing, social interaction, personal achievement, and pure enjoyment. We need to challenge any assumptions about activity and ability, recognising that all children benefit from regular involvement in active play experiences. Examining our belief systems and how they may be hampering the true value of our programs for children will lead us to discover practice that removes restrictive ideas and encourages children to embrace success.

Simply, inclusion in early childhood active play programs is essential because:

- it helps all children to develop positive attitudes about themselves and their abilities;
- motor skills are important to learning and development; and
- everyone enjoys playing—especially children.

The *Willing and Able Program* (1995) developed by the Australian Sports Commission provides practical advice on inclusive activity programs to teachers and community leaders working with people from early childhood to beyond secondary levels. It suggests that, when reviewing program goals and practice, early childhood workers should consider these questions:

- Is the disability a problem?
- If so, whose problem?
- How can we adapt and modify the environment, the equipment, the game and leadership style? (*Willing and Able Program* pamphlet).

> *... Early childhood workers need to question the ethical dimensions of curriculum and practice*

These simple questions are the starting point for developing programs that are inclusive and support children in becoming the best they can be. As Robbins (1997) states, 'the birth of excellence begins with our awareness that our beliefs are a choice'.

Let's demonstrate this ideology to children, so they too can discover, by meeting challenges and having a go, the champions they have within.

Libby Henderson-Kelly
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NB: The *Willing and Able* book is available through the Australian Sports Commission on (02) 6214 1111 or www.ausport.gov.au

Physical activity and children with asthma

Asthma is an inflammatory disease of the lungs that occurs in 20 to 25 per cent of Australian children. Proper management of the condition is especially important when children with asthma participate in strenuous physical activity, because many of them will get exercise-induced asthma.

All asthma attacks should be treated immediately.

During an asthma attack the child should be seated. The carer should remain calm and give the child four puffs of 'reliever' medication. Wait four minutes and, if there is no improvement, call for medical assistance as the attack is severe. Continue to give four puffs every four minutes until medical assistance arrives or symptoms improve.

Asthma severity can vary from the most common type—infrequent episodic asthma with symptoms every six to eight weeks—to frequent episodic, with major symptoms every four to six weeks and some symptoms between episodes, to persistent asthma with daily symptoms and regular medication.

> *...Common symptoms signalling an asthma attack are wheezing or coughing, tightness in the chest, and shortness of breath*

The most common symptoms signalling an asthma attack are wheezing or coughing, tightness in the chest, and shortness of breath. These symptoms are due to hyperesponsiveness of the airways. Common triggers of an asthma attack are upper respiratory viral infection, airborne pollens, smoke, strong perfumes, aspirin, and intense physical activity, especially in cold, dry, and windy conditions. An asthma attack usually occurs immediately or within 15 minutes of exposure to the triggering factor for that individual.

The severity of the asthma attack can be determined by observing and talking to the child. In a mild attack the child may have a cough or a soft wheeze and mild breathing discomfort, but can speak without difficulty. If the child has a moderate attack he/she may have a persistent cough or a loud wheeze, obvious difficulty in breathing, and can only speak in short sentences. Symptoms of a severe attack include gasping for breath, pale and sweaty skin, blueness around the lips, inability to speak more than a few words before gasping. Wheezing may or may not be present in a severe asthma attack.

To reduce the risk of exercise-induced asthma (EIA), the carer should ensure that children with frequent episodic or persistent asthma observe the following procedures before participating in moderate to strenuous physical activity.

1) Children should not participate if they currently have or have recently recovered from a respiratory infection, or if the weather is cold, dry, windy, or polluted.
2) Children should take a short acting 'reliever' medication 15 minutes before strenuous physical activity, and for some children immediately before the activity.
3) Ensure that children do a progressive warm-up such as a circuit for about 10 minutes, with alternating vigorous activity for one minute followed by a minute of quieter activity.
4) Do not let children who develop asthma symptoms during the warm-up participate in strenuous physical activity. Instead, treat the attack and give them a quieter activity.
5) Avoid abruptly stopping intense physical activity, by including less intense activity for about 10 minutes at the end of the session.
6) Observe children with asthma after completion of the physical activity session, as EIA commonly occurs at this time.

Provided all the above precautions are taken, children with stable asthma should be encouraged to participate in play, games, and sport with their peers. Children with persistent asthma should first be involved in low-intensity physical activity or in games where there are intermittent bouts of intense and quiet activity such as tennis. Swimming is also highly recommended for children with asthma. Do not feel tempted to let these children be inactive because of the risk of an asthma attack. Physical activity improves children's cardiovascular fitness, general physical fitness, self-esteem, and motor skills. It also lessens the number and severity of asthma attacks. All these factors enable the child to join in activities with their peers without having to feel different from them.

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Loco about logos

'Are we going to the Olympic Games, Mum?' Jack wants to know. My answer is brief and to the point. Then I add (untruthfully), 'Sorry.'

I'm expecting a protracted whinge along the lines of it not being fair and *everybody* else is going. (Jack is seven.)

But, amazingly, Jack merely says, 'Well, can I have a Matchbox Commodore, then?'

'What have toy cars got to do with the Olympics?' I ask. A reasonable question.

'It's got the Olympics logo on it.'

God! Are they going to stick five rings on every damn thing? (And put up the price accordingly.)

'I want a 'lympics car like Jack's,' four-year-old Daisy whines.

'*Girls* don't have Commodores,' says Jack (who has a lot to learn). 'But you could have an Olympics Barbie doll.'

Barbie at the Olympics? Doing what? She can't even stand up by herself.

The kids are eyeing me hopefully. I'm about to tell them that I don't intend to spend one cent of my hard-earned money on Olympic spin-offs (a kinder term than 'rip-offs'). But then I say, 'We'll see.'

Coward.

I relay this conversation to my office colleagues.

'Don't be *mean*, Sally,' young Sharon chides. 'Profits from the games merchandise are going to the Olympians.'

'Is that supposed to impress me?' I sniff. 'They've got more money than me. I can't afford to spend my days running and jumping and throwing javelins.'

Sharon tells me I've got the wrong attitude. But Jenny says, 'I agree with Sally. Besides, these Olympic souvenirs are made in China.'

'That does it!' I declare.

'Oh, come on!' Rachel protests. 'You can't let your two miss out. It's important for children not to feel different from their peers.'

'And that's what the marketing people rely on!' I say hotly. 'Look at showbags, for instance. You can't take your kids to a show without having to fork out at least 10 dollars for a bag full of rubbish. Then there are the spin-offs from children's TV programs. They're worth *millions*.'

'*Billions!*' says Jenny. 'Toys ... clothing ... videos ... books ... comics ... cards ... plates ... mugs ... cutlery ... breakfast cereals ...' She pauses for breath. 'Somebody described the spin-offs from Hi-5 as a "marketing bonanza". And somebody else said the tie-in from Teletubbies has been a "marketing triumph". It makes you think!'

I think I'd like to kill whoever thought up the Teletubbies. I got no peace until I bought the yellow one (what's its name?) for Daisy. After about three weeks it disappeared. I found it the other day, buried in the sandpit. Whatsitsname was sadly wet and soggy. I declared life extinct and tossed him/her in the bin, trying to forget how much he/she had cost.

Wise men profit from fools (Cato)

So, as I tell Jenny, I am not thrilled to hear about the latest BBC offering for little kids. Tweenies. Last Christmas in Britain, Tweenies products made 106 million dollars profit. The ABC plans to start screening Tweenies in July. The product sales will begin soon after. Should I get rid of the TV set in June?

'What infuriates me,' says Jenny, 'is how some children's programs are designed purely to sell merchandise. It seems it was the first Star Wars movies that started it all—when somebody discovered how much money could be made from spin-offs.'

'Well, it's not just TV shows and the Olympics who are into merchandising,' Sharon says. 'So's the Royal family. And the Pope.'

I remember how appalled my grandmother was to receive a present of a Princess Di teatowel. And Gran says she can't stand seeing every second person in the street wearing a T-shirt advertising something-or-other. I know how she feels.

I visit the loo. Sharon is applying another layer of mascara and raving on to Rachel about some stage musical.

'When did you see it?' Rachel asks.

'Oh, I couldn't afford to *see* it,' Sharon shrugs. 'But I've got the T-shirt.'

Sally O'Sullivan

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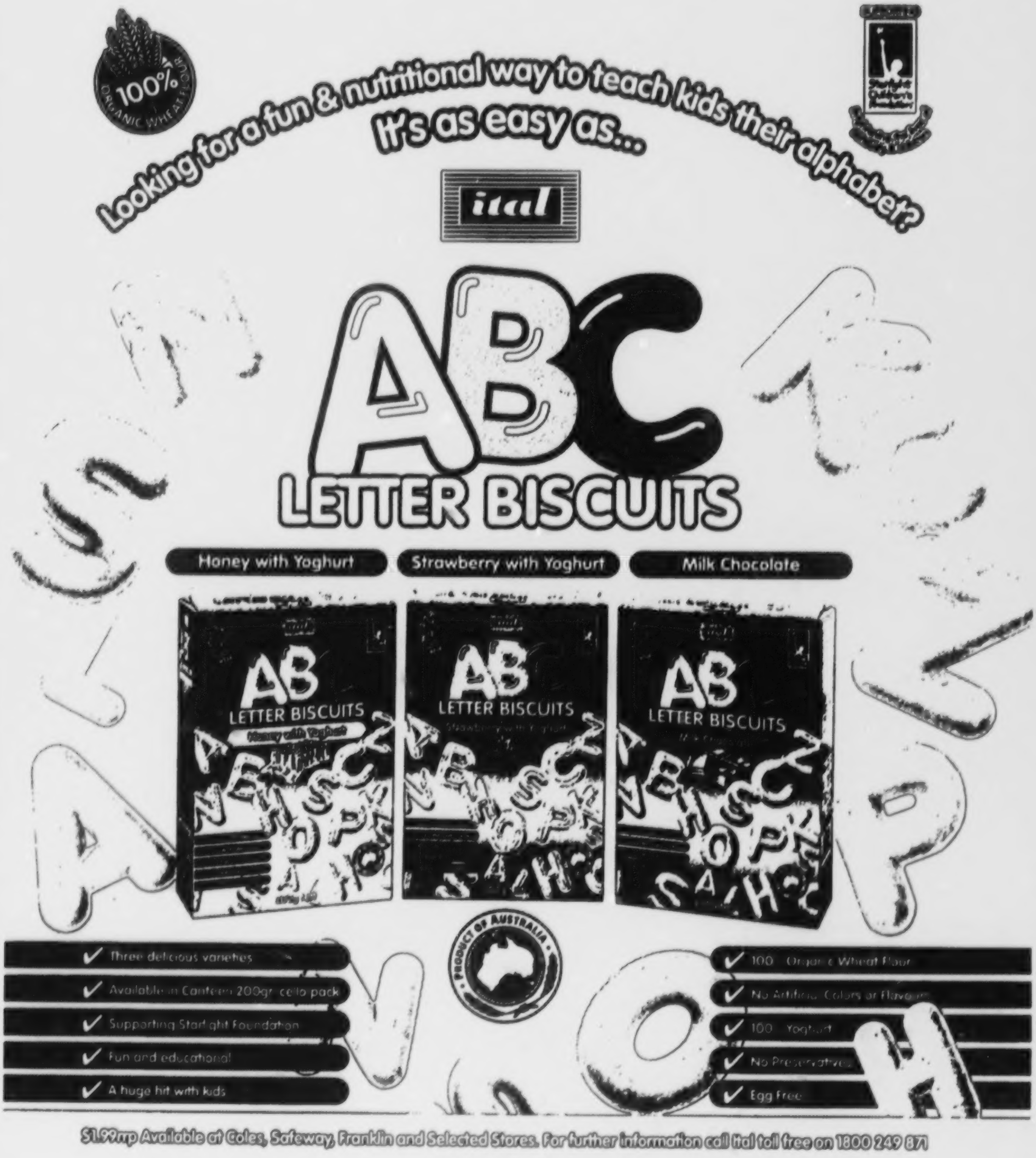
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Thea O'Connor

Promoting healthy body image

Great news for all teachers and carers of young children concerned about the growing incidence of poor body image, dieting, and obesity now affecting boys and girls at an increasingly younger age. There is something we can do to help reverse the trend, and Melbourne's *Body Image and Health Incorporated* would have to be the starting point.

Thea O'Connor, dietician and director of Body Image, says the organisation was formed in 1992/93 to help teenagers and young women overcome poor body image, but its focus has now expanded to include the increasing numbers of men and young children also afflicted. The organisation's main focus, she says, is 'working for social change so *everyone* can feel good about and care for their bodies'.

Body Image works towards this change by raising the awareness of the apparel, advertising and media industries, health and education professionals, and the research community. It provides training workshops for teachers in schools and also for major fashion retailers; coordinates forums and conferences for researchers to discuss their findings; provides information to the public, students, teachers, and health professionals; and provides seminars for parents.

Interestingly, there have recently been reports in *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Canberra Times* illustrating just how difficult effecting social change can be. On June 23, the *SMH* reported that leading British fashion magazine editors at a 'body image' summit in London had offered 'to adopt a self-regulatory code that will discipline them against the use of unhealthily thin models and blacklist agencies that persistently provide them', with the aim of 'encouraging the fashion industry to produce and promote clothes for a wider range of sizes and shapes'. The summit observed that 'media images of super-thin models are stripping women of their confidence and self-esteem'. The next day *The Canberra Times* (June 24, 2000) reported that the same editors had published an open letter denying the offer. So the battle continues.

Providing support to an organisation such as *Body Image* is one way of 'maintaining the rage' against the machinations of the media giants. Thea says, 'We can show the fashion houses how they can be part of the solution; that they're not going to lose money if they make people feel good about themselves.' She also advises 'using our spending power wisely,' and 'believing that our voice can make a difference'.

But we can also promote healthier attitudes in our children through role modelling, Thea says. This includes:

- examining our own attitudes and behaviours;
- taking the moralism out of foods: 'Once we forbid something it becomes attractive.';
- 'Getting children involved in the sensory perspective of foods—taste, texture etc.';
- responding to children's complaints that they're 'too fat' by asking 'Why do you think that?';
- 'Controlling the environment by providing healthy foods but not controlling the child … The more controlling carers are about food, the less able children are at self-regulating their intake. If you coerce and are overly zealous, it can cause an aversion to the very food you are trying to encourage.';
- teachers developing a whole school approach;
- promoting *International No Diet Day* each year on May 6.

In the five years *Body Image and Health Inc.* has been in operation it has made significant advances, says Thea. And it is currently advocating to have body image recognised as a significant issue in government policy. The positive feedback the organisation receives—mostly from teachers trying to cope with the growing incidence of eating disorders in younger children—is evidence enough to prove the need.

In the meantime, Thea encourages, 'Don't be disheartened. Sometimes lone voices can get a lot of publicity.'

LT

Further information

Email: bodyimag@cryptic.rch.unimelb.edu.au, or find an abundance of fascinating information on their website: www.internationalnodietday.com.au

The importance *of* *movement in childhood*

Movement is individual yet shared by all nations. We use it every day. It helps us to be skilful and to make each day enjoyable. It occurs when we jump, hug someone, ride a bicycle, greet friends, reach into a cupboard, dance and sing, or eat our food. It is functional and expressive. It has been called an international language, an intelligence, a sixth sense, and a health benefit.

Movement underpins everything we do yet we pay attention only when our movements are restricted by injury, sickness, or pain. We take it for granted—seldom considering the complexities of our abilities to run, dance, or walk.

How can we use movement in teaching and learning?

- We can see movement. It is an indicator that the internal processes of motor development are taking place. For example, babies try to pull themselves upright from a sitting to a standing position or slide along on their bottoms to reach a toy just beyond their grasp.
- Too often, however, we celebrate the big milestones such as the first step, climbing stairs, or speaking a word, while small but important changes go unmarked. For example, learning to shift weight from one side of the body to the other requires coordination and balance and is a momentous step for a young child in learning what their bodies can do. It means that they can climb into a rocker, over a trestle or fence, onto a bicycle. Such a skill demands timing, balance, and coordination, and requires mind and body to work in harmony. Yet an adult may not notice!

- Movement should be regarded as problem-solving using the body. It needs to be documented and recognised by adults as a vital part of a child's learning.
- Children need 'to move to learn' (and in doing this they also 'learn to move' more skilfully, effectively, and expressively) and so opportunities for movement exploration need to be built into any environment planned for children. They learn to act upon and react to objects and other people in their immediate environment through play and planned activities.
- As teachers and caregivers we have a role to play in relation to children's movement proficiency. Children's movement skill and confidence depends on environmental factors such as motivation, encouragement, guidance, and opportunity to practise skills. Children's confidence is influenced by our attitudes, participation, and interest.

What has research taught us about movement?

- Young children are a very special group about which we know very little in relation to physical activity and movement. So, watered-down primary programs are not acceptable for preschool children.
- Children up to seven years of age learn more successfully when a respected adult demonstrates, describes, and practises with them new skills they are learning.
- Hand and foot dominance are largely determined by the age of five.
- Preschool children's outdoor activities during free play comprised 10 minutes of physically active play and 40 minutes of sedentary play. (This finding led to calls for regular movement programs to be included in all preschool curricula).
- Physical fitness may not be an appropriate concept for young children. (Their mastery of movement patterns such as jumping, running, climbing may be sufficient to promote wellbeing).
- Movement is healthy. It assists concentration, confidence, and competence; reduces pressure and stress; and leads to a 'feel-good' effect.
- A broad foundation of physical activity and movement holds children's interest for longer periods, and allows children to develop general motor proficiency, rather than specialising in one area too early.
- Parents, caregivers, and teachers have responsibilities in relation to children's movement and motor development. The presence of an interested adult has a stabilising effect on a child under five years.

Movement with young children does not require costly equipment and commercial structures. It requires time, planning, and interest by adults to encourage physically-active play.

Wendy Schiller
de Lissa Institute of Early Childhood and Family Studies, University of South Australia

REVIEWS

Lifting the Lid on Early Childhood Literacy

Kaye Lowe

ACT: AECA (2000)

ISBN 1 87589 044 0 RRP $10.89

Literacy, according to Kaye Lowe, comprises four key elements: talking, listening, reading, and writing. In 17 pages, Lowe takes the reader through the theoretical underpinnings and principles of early literacy learning, and presents practical ideas about how to set up and support early childhood classroom literacy programs.

Beginning with the assumption that by the time children reach school age they are already competent literacy learners, having acquired skills at home and in the early childhood centre, Lowe suggests implementing an early childhood literacy environment that recognises diversity of experience and offers opportunities to talk, read, and write. She states that 'children talk their way to meaning' (p.3).

Examples given illustrate how children use language to make meaning for social, imaginative, and functional purposes. She names the fundamental principles of literacy learning: literacy begins with talking and listening; reading is comprehension; and writing is a powerful form of human expression.

A number of activities are suggested to help promote talk. Listening, however, seems to be an assumed by-product of adults reading to children or teaching them rhymes and chants, and more concrete examples of listening activities could have been included. Comprehension is encouraged through immersing children in literacy-rich environments.

Finally, Lowe connects writing to reading, encouraging practitioners to share their own writing experiences while encouraging children to put pen to paper to express their thoughts.

This book is helpful in its clear synopsis of theory and its application to practice, and Lowe's suggestions range from the 'tried and true' to innovative and interdisciplinary. I would have liked to see more interdisciplinary ideas and a connection between the standard literacies of reading, writing, talking, and listening; and the 'other' literacies, such as visual, social, and emotional literacies. However, Lowe's ideas should confirm current application and give practitioners the opportunity to reflect upon their reasons for doing what they do.

Reesa Sorin
School of Education
James Cook University, Cairns

The Toxic Playground. A Guide to Reducing the Chemical Load in Schools and Childcare Centres

Jo Immigs

Sydney: Total Environment Centre (2000)

ISBN 0 947360 16 6 RRP $25.30

'And I don't want to play and I hate everyone and I'm tired and I'm fed up and I don't want to sleep and I can't concentrate and I've got a headache and ...' (Immigs, 2000, p.9).

These symptoms are becoming more prevalent among children today. Young children, because of their comparatively small body mass, are the most vulnerable victims of our increasingly toxic environment. In this book, Jo Immigs presents an abundance of research evidence on the chemical emissions and effects on children of our everyday surrounds, e.g. carpets, plastic products (including toys), common cleaning products, and personal hygiene products (including perfumes and shampoos). In a reader-friendly style Immigs details the toxicology of chemicals, the range of symptoms noted by researchers, and the incredibly broad range of common everyday products which emit chemicals. Not only does she provide valuable information on dangerous chemicals, but also helps the reader to consider safer alternatives. Through focusing on the toxic effects on young children, she provides a sensible discussion on how staff working in child care centres and schools can change their practices so as to reduce children's exposure to chemical emissions.

Immigs has structured her book into manageable sections, such as good indoor air quality. Each section includes:

- research evidence of chemical discharge;
- the effects of chemical exposure on children;
- ways of reducing emissions;
- suggestions for safer alternatives; and
- a quick and easy checklist to help readers analyse their environment for accumulative chemical exposure.

This book makes an important contribution to the health and wellbeing of our youngest and most vulnerable citizens. *The Toxic Playground* should be mandatory for all who are responsible for the care and education of children.

Marilyn Fleer
University of Canberra

Dr Fleer is currently on secondment to the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

Sportstart: Developing Your Kids' Skills at Home (Revised edition)

Australian Sports Commission

ACT: Australian Sports Commisssion (1993)

ISBN 0 642 16655 2 RRP $13.00

Available from AECA

Sportstart promotes play as the basis for helping children develop movement and sports-related skills. It provides a range of practical ideas and strategies that will help any adult caring for young children consider how to encourage active play programs in their homes, centres, or playgroups, with individuals or groups of children.

Sportstart identifies games and activities for children aged between three and 12 years, although the primary value is for children between three and eight years.

The most appropriate 'sport' for very young children is movement based on play—physically active play in the early childhood sector. *Sportstart* recognises the importance of play as the best approach for providing activity and movement programs for children. It encourages children to take the initiative and solve problems, use language and communication skills, and interact socially with others.

The activity and environment ideas are mainly those we would all be familiar with, but may have let fall into the dark recesses of our early memories. Reviving and using these games can be as much fun for adults as for children, and so encourages us to play with our children.

Sportstart was initially developed by the Aussie Sports program as a resource to encourage interactions and activity within the family environment. Research had suggested that a primary motivator for children being involved with sports-related activity was influenced by family-based experiences and attitudes. As a result the presentation of the book is mostly pictorial, practical and fun, encouraging readers to 'get active and have a go'. It is a great resource for anyone involved in the care and development of children and is especially useful in the training and education of future early childhood workers and early primary teachers.

Libby Henderson-Kelly
Early Childhood Consultant, ACT

Inviting Play: Photographs of Imaginatively Constructed Early Childhood Settings

Lee Christofis (ed.)

Richmond: FKA Multicultural Resource Centre (1999)

ISBN 1 875858 29 6 RRP $33.00

Inviting Play is a useful resource for practitioners and parents for ideas on organising materials and equipment to invite children to play. The photographs in the book demonstrate that with a little thought, care, and imagination, ordinary play materials and environments can be made to look very appealing to both children and adults. The materials used provide excellent examples of ways to meaningfully include multicultural elements in play spaces.

Inviting Play is a photographic essay, documenting the FKA Multicultural Resource Centre's 1996/97 EXPOs on multicultural perspectives. Their warehouse office in Richmond (Victoria) was transformed into an early childhood centre with environments developed and arranged by the team and photographed for this book.

The FKA consultants used everyday items found in early childhood settings and homes, such as blocks, wooden figures, garden tools and trolleys, photographs, boxes, cushions, fabrics, plants, and other natural materials to set the scene for children's play.

The messages conveyed by the thoughtful arrangements of the resources—such as play; respect for children's interests; and a valuing of the equipment, children, and their families—were very clear. The text imparts a belief that children are powerful and competent and that there is a need for practitioners and carers organising their environments to consider their philosophy on the way children think, learn, and communicate with others.

This book will inspire readers to use their everyday early childhood equipment and resources in new and unusual ways. With the addition of objects from nature, and other cultures, and fabrics, cushions, and photographs; ordinary materials metamorphose, providing opportunities to explore texture, colour, shape, form, and meaning. This book reflects exciting possibilities for young children's learning environments.

Wendy Shepherd
Director, Mia-Mia Child and Family Study Centre
Macquarie University

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News & Views

Competency testing for preschoolers

Margaret Hodge, Minister for Education in the United Kingdom, is planning competency testing for children at the completion of preschool. There has been intense pressure for the minister to modify her plans, but she continues to maintain that even play in early childhood programs must be structured play, designed and monitored by teachers (*Education Review*, Feb/Mar 2000).

New AECA book

AECA, in partnership with the Department of Defence, is publishing a book to help families who move house frequently. Pam Linke, one of AECA's best-selling authors (*Let's Stop Bullying* and *Pants Aren't Rude*) has recently completed the manuscript.

Moving house is about change. For parents it is usually about the change of employment, change of environment, and the change of social group. This involves the loss of people and things that were important, while also finding new opportunities and pleasures. This change can have a greater impact on young children than adults or older children because they don't have the experience of previous changes to remember and build on. To help children manage, learn from, and build on change is one of the most important gifts that parents can give to their children. This book aims to help parents give this gift to children. Although the book uses examples from Australian Defence Force families, the information about moving is relevant to all families. The book will be available in September 2000.

Email etiquette

Many organisations are seeing the worth of developing email policies. These policies include whether management can inspect the emails of employees, whether employees can use email for personal correspondence, for how long emails should be saved, and guidelines for appropriate times to send messages, when a phone call or face-to-face communication is preferred. There are also issues about registering emails, which are increasingly being used in place of 'snail mail', and not going through the traditional registration processes.

Briefings

From the same source (www.briefings.com) came the following:

Every once in a while, get off the merry-go-round and ask yourself these questions: 'What are we doing?' 'What should we be doing?' 'What should we be doing next?' 'What should we not be doing?'

Don't use the word volunteer in print material when trying to recruit volunteers. Reason: stereotypes about volunteers will block your message. Use phrases such as 'get involved' or 'become part of …'. Use the title of the volunteer position e.g. 'be a tutor' or 'excursion supervisor', etc.

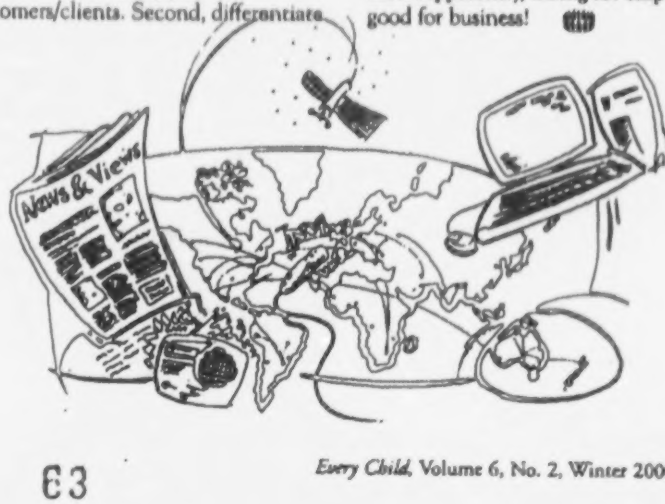
Customer Relations Management

Take out some of the management jargon and it's amazing how close a lot of the new management thinking is to good educational practice. Read what follows and see what you think. It appears that the guru of management thinking is Customer Relations Management (CRM). The core of CRM is a four-step process. First, identify your customers/clients. Second, differentiate them in terms of both their needs and their value to your organisation. Third, interact with them in ways that improve cost efficiency and the effectiveness of your interaction. The fourth and final step: customise some aspect of the products or services you offer that customer. Treat the customer differently based on what you have learned from your interaction.

Over time, this approach will pay dividends in terms of customer satisfaction, and should reward your organisation/service. 'Over time' is the key to this strategy—keeping customers/clients long term is one of the keys to profitability. Interesting reading along these lines is *Customers.com: How to Create a Profitable Business Strategy for the Internet and Beyond* (Seybold & Marshak, Random House, 1998).

Empowering employees

The latest edition of an interesting magazine called *Fast Company* contains an article about a clothes manufacturing company in the Dominican Republic—not the place where one would expect a company to receive an international award for empowering employees! 'Everything we give to our workers gets returned to us in terms of efficiency, quality, loyalty, and innovation—it's just smart business.' One of the benefits the employees in this company enjoy is company-subsidised child care, it also sponsors a club that teaches prenatal care. Apparently, caring for employees is good for business!



AECA Opinion

Quality child care and public debate

In late April and early May, the national newspapers suddenly blossomed with articles and letters discussing the 'best' form of care for very young children. Some articles were in response to cartoonist Michael Leunig's depictions of a sorrowful baby alone at 'the crèche'. A slug-like infant, attempting to understand life, concludes: 'I'm a stay-at-crèche baby so she doesn't have to be a stay-at-home mum'. Leunig's ideas were elaborated in an article by Bettina Arndt (SMH, 2000) the following Saturday. Arndt's take: Leunig's cartoons stem from the strong and justifiable sense that mother care is best care, particularly in early infancy. The article alleged that contrary findings have been 'fudged' by Australian child care researchers and commentators.

> *AECA believes that high quality, affordable child care should be available to all parents and children who ask for it*

Also mentioned in Arndt's article and the surrounding controversy was a study by researchers from Macquarie and Charles Sturt Universities. Linda Harrison and Judy Ungerer found that 'informal child care harms development,' in the words of *The Australian's* page one headline. They found that, of children receiving extensive non-parental care in their early years, children in formal care settings were:

- more securely attached to their mothers at 12 months;
- more socially competent at preschool; and
- better adjusted and academically more successful in their first year of school than their peers in informal settings.

The study also highlighted strong preferences among parents for 'informal' care, particularly for children under one.

Predictably, the claims and counter-claims of participants in this ruckus fell along partisan lines. Don Edgar (SMH, 2000) argued that Leunig needed to 'get his facts and theories right', and begin to understand 'the social causes that limit what people can do', adding, 'support for parenting and child care of any form would be a start in the right direction'. Peter Ellingsen (SMH, 2000) recalled his sense of abandonment on being left in child care in his third year of life. Children need, indeed 'hunger for', their mother's love and presence; it should form the basis of care in the early years, he claimed.

Eva Cox (*The Australian*, 2000) argued that the ideology of mothering obscures the history and variety of childcare arrangements, creating 'guilt in mothers'. The Government's current path 'will only end up creating poorer quality care options and increasing the divide between rich and poor'. For Angela Shanahan (*The Australian*, 2000), Harrison and Ungerer's research is both equivocal and wrong-headed. She claims informal care from 'grandma, sister or friend' has one 'unacknowledged and unquantifiable advantage over kindergarten'. Love.

What is a parent to do? What is the 'best' form of care? The problem is enormous and the stakes are high.

This debate expresses the anxiety that parents and society might make 'the wrong decision', alongside a demand for simple and unequivocal answers. There is a 'right kind of care', and researchers and philosophers should tell us what it is—using appropriate data.

A recent book, *Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care* (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999), suggests that the search for data on good quality child care is related to the contemporary fear of ethical choices. The authors argue that the search for quality is motivated by a desire to 'ensure standardisation, predictability and control' in a world of 'multiple perspectives and meanings, diversity and uncertainty'. A world in which we deeply feel, and wish to be relieved of, the 'burden of choice'.

> *Parents must be empowered to make difficult choices about who cares for their child*

Arndt (SMH, 2000) cites a study that found early childhood teacher education students would not put their own baby in a child care centre. These students, Arndt suggests, are 'presumably well placed to judge the issue'. But are they? Who among us really feels qualified to unequivocally support formal non-parental care for all children from birth?

Every piece of emerging research tells a different story. And every story of children and their mothers and fathers struggling to find happiness and a decent loving home seems to suggest that something has gone wrong.

The solutions should be simple, we think. Either the evidence for child care stacks up, or it doesn't. Parents, governments, opinion-makers, and cartoonists all demand an answer: is it okay to send my baby to child care?

The 'answer' doesn't lie in 'facts'. There will always be those who question the methodology and veracity of 'positive' studies. Those on the other side (who

believe economic independence for women is linked to providing child care for young children) will struggle to contradict and deny 'negative' studies that suggest non-parental care is not always good for the children involved. The research will never be sufficiently reliable to convince everyone one way or another.

The only way to solve this problem is to recognise it as a question of choice. Statistics and stories aside, AECA believes that high quality, affordable child care should be available to all parents and children who ask for it.

Parents, educators, governments, and everyone in the community must demand high quality child care. This doesn't just mean asking the authorities to ensure appropriate regulation. Parents must be empowered to ask their child care provider, 'What are your staff qualifications, staff to child ratios, and turnover rates?' And they must be empowered to make difficult choices—about who cares for their child and who they vote for—if they don't like the answers.

In addition, we can recognise that how our children are cared for is an ethical dilemma for us to solve *as a society*. At present, individual parents are required to make choices on behalf of their children. They require information and detailed studies to help them make these decisions. But they also require support for the choices they make. Gradually reducing funding for formal child care may mean children use fewer hours but women are not 'going back home'. Full time maternal care never existed. There is no 'past' to get back to.

It is not for us to undersell or suppress the studies with conclusions we don't like. We must hold to our principles: the right of parents with young children to access quality care, underwritten by Government funding and regulation.

Megan Grant
AECA Research Officer

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Vale **Jo Pender**

AECA pays tribute to Jo Pender who died suddenly at 32 years of age in March this year.

Jo was a skilled early childhood professional, committed to advocating for Aboriginal children, and in particular to supporting the provision and operation of good preschool programs for them. She worked both in New South Wales and nationally for this cause, teaching, challenging, and supporting others on the journey with her characteristic generosity, wisdom, and good humour.

The exploration of her own Aboriginality was very dear to Jo, and she willingly shared her knowledge and experience in raising the awareness of others. She was committed to reconciliation, and was tireless and inspiring in encouraging others to broaden their understanding and share the commitment.

As director of the Aboriginal Early Childhood Services Support Unit in Sydney, Jo travelled widely throughout New South Wales, meeting Aboriginal families and children and visiting and working with their services. She also gathered and effectively promoted resources to support others in their work around the state. She served on many committees and reference groups to support the achievement of her goals, and was a respected lobbyist.

Jo was well known to AECA, both for her work in the field and as a member of AECA's NSW State Executive Committee and contributor to National Council meetings. She took a leading role as a trainer and discussion leader in the work preceding the drafting of AECA's *Statement of Apology and Commitment*.

We miss Jo as a colleague and a friend, as well as mourning the loss of her vision and work. AECA's sincere sympathy is with Jo's mother, Maria Pender (also well known in the early childhood field), her fiance and other family members, and her friends.

Margaret Young
Director, Lady Gowrie Child Centre, Sydney

A Commitment to ACTION

The following working document—which emerged from a National Issues Forum on Indigenous Education, November 1999—first appeared in Unicorn *in December 1999. We believe it is of such importance that it is reprinted here (with minor ommissions), with kind permission from the Australian College of Education.*

Context

A national issues forum on indigenous education was held from November 3–5, 1999 in Alice Springs. Coordinated by the Australian College of Education (ACE) with support from the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA), the forum involved more than 100 delegates, representative of professional, parent, and community groups, as well as systems and sectors nationwide.

This document constitutes a significant outcome of the forum, given that it captures the collective view of delegates regarding the need for an action-oriented approach to further development. While the term 'we' refers to those who participated, it needs to be emphasised that this is an ongoing process, and that all groups working to support indigenous youth are encouraged to use this statement within and beyond their own settings.

Preamble

Improving education and training outcomes for indigenous youth is a longstanding issue. As many delegates emphasised, decades of talk and inconsistent effort had preceded the forum.

For those who search for trends, it would appear that indigenous education and training is now a mainstream agenda item in many quarters. However, despite gradual general improvement on a national scale, there remains a great deal to be done.

We believe that there is at present an alignment of circumstances that have made improving levels of indigenous achievement the nation's first priority in education and training. These circumstances include:

- increased understanding of the crucial importance of reconciliation, and the role of education in that process;
- Commonwealth leadership and resourcing;
- State, Territory and community activity and support;
- growth and maturity of advocacy processes over time;
- development of a research base which is both informative and practical; and
- a new sense of urgency.

Faith needs to be kept with those who have advocated and fought for such an alignment for 30 years or more. To that end, an indigenous voice should be a core component of all policy, planning, implementation and related matters concerned with the education, development and training of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth.

At the conclusion of this significant national forum, we hereby commit ourselves to implementing the changes necessary to bring about real and more rapid benefits for indigenous students.

In our view, an action orientation is central to that commitment. The phrase 'just do it', coined in one workshop, reflected the spirit of urgent reciprocal responsibility. By drawing together hearts and minds, and employing data-driven approaches, we believe that we can work together to produce substantial gains in student performance.

With the dawning of a new millennium, our view is that a new will exists to make a difference, through more strategic action and development. From our perspective, there is potential for a quantum leap, as distinct from gradual improvement. At the same time, we are aware of—but not paralysed by—a number of 'real world' impediments such as unemployment, racism and structural change.

From now on, a significant part of our work will be the development of closer links between education, health and related sectors. If we are serious about achieving success, then we need to strengthen existing partnerships as well as forge new alliances in order to generate improved outcomes for indigenous youth across Australia.

To assist in translating this rhetoric to reality, we have identified five key areas for action—Partnerships and Networks; Quality Teachers and Administrators; Effective Pedagogies; Leadership and Responsibility; and Outcomes and Results.

These areas are part of an integrated framework to guide and support our future work, rather than discrete checklists or 'wishlists'. We have also contributed to an initial national register compiled by the Australian College of Education that already includes more than 70 examples of good practice, select examples of which are cited below. We strongly encourage other groups to add value to both the register and framework by reviewing, modifying and expanding their contents.

1. Partnerships and networks

We will conduct further work with regard to:

- community-based action involving participating school and community members (e.g. inter-agency cooperation);
- schools as proactive community centres, facilitating linkages between health, community services, welfare and education delivery;
- developing a sense of 'agency' for indigenous youth (e.g. in terms of greater responsibility and empowerment in local settings);
- identifying essential preconditions for improvement at macro and micro levels in areas such as resourcing, system/community support and strategic alliances;
- coordination within and between agencies/departments;
- meaningful connections between key groups and organisations; and
- regional agreements involving negotiation, implementation and evaluation.

Examples of current good practice

- Aboriginal Health Worker Training Programs—Fran Emerson (02) 6289 5134.
- Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) Indegenous Education Project—Anthony Ketley (02 6285 1351.
- Cape York Communities Project—Shane Williams (07) 3237 0826.
- Croc Eisteddfod Festivals—Peter Sjoquist (02) 9417 4122.
- Indigenous Health and Education Program Review—Bob Boughton (08) 8951 7637.
- Otitis Media Initiatives—Al Yonovitz (08) 8945 5511; Charles Davison (02) 9550 5666.
- Targeting Early Literacy—Family and Schools Projects—Melodie Bat (08) 8951 7536.

2. Quality teachers and administrators

We will conduct further work with regard to:

- pre-service education and support;
- in-service/continuing professional development—for teachers and administrators;
- specific support for indigenous education workers;
- appropriate curriculum development, implementation and evaluation;

- teacher placement (e.g. 'the right teacher in the right context');
- development and strengthening of teacher skills and knowledge;
- support for principals as leaders of schools and educational improvement; and
- appropriate resourcing—in addition to using existing resources more efficiently, additional resources may well be required given the magnitude of the training program.

Examples of current good practice

- Certificates 3 and 4 in indigenous education work—Ron Watt (08) 8939 7111.
- English as a Second Language (ESL) Teacher Development Project—Pip Hodge (08) 8922 0735.
- Graduate Certificate in Australian Indigenous ESL Teaching—Ruth Gledhill (08) 8951 7055.
- Kimberley Literacy Project—Michael King (08) 9212 9206.
- Mentoring Support for Indigenous Teachers Program—Julie Donald (08) 8999 5819.
- Ngaaga Ngaaga Kooidumay Program—Lynette Riley-Mundine (02) 6883 3400.
- Teaching the Teachers Indigenous Australian Studies—Rhonda Craven (02) 9772 6557.

3. Effective pedagogies

We will conduct further work with regard to:

- 'authentic' teaching and assessment practices (e.g. student-centred and community-oriented);
- context, diversity, culture and languages;
- core learnings—integration of literacy/numeracy and community-based learnings (e.g. multi-literacies, generic competencies, critical reflection etc.);
- sharing of good practice;
- encouragement of innovation and ongoing curriculum development;
- increasing student understanding of the importance of education and training; and
- effective learning environments (e.g. preconditions for learning).

Examples of current good practice

- Aboriginal Ways of Learning—Paul Hughes (08) 8201 5329.
- ESL for Indigenous Listening and Speaking Skills—Fran Murray (08) 8922 0724.
- Indigenous Students Achieving Numeracy—Will Moroney (08) 8363 0288.
- Irrkerlantye Learning Centre—C. Hodges (08) 8595 5222; N. Traves (08) 8959 5211.
- Koorie Open Door Education—Catherine Healey (03) 9637 2306.
- Positive Self-Identity for Indigenous Students—Nola Purdie (07) 3864 3787.
- Scaffolding Literacy—Brian Gray (02) 6201 2468; Fiona McLoughlin (08) 8952 5633.

4. Leadership and responsibility

We will conduct further work with regard to:

- individuals and communities;
- associations and organisations;
- systems and sectors;
- national, state/territory and local governments;
- Chambers of commerce, industry and business;
- acknowledgement and promotion of indigenous leadership;
- identification of starting and end points, as well as implementation strategies; and
- an equally strong emphasis on developing and exercising proactive leadership at all levels which is empowering, purposeful, action-oriented and outcome-based.

Examples of current good practice

- A National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 1996-2002—Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA)—Pat McDermott (02) 6240 7813.
- 'Learning Lessons' (Northern Territory Review of Indigenous Education)—Ken Davies (08) 8999 5828.
- NSW Aboriginal Education Policy—Charles Davison (02) 9550 5666.
- 'Partners in a Learning Culture' (Indigenous Vocational Education and Training Strategy)—Chris Eccles (07) 3246 2300.
- Report on WA Education and Training Strategic Plan—David Price (08) 9321 6800.
- Wadu National Vocational Learning Strategy—Clair Andersen (03) 6267 2735.
- 'Walking Our Talk' (Ministerial Advisory Council on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education, MACATSIE, Framework)—Bob Munn (07) 3237 0807.

5. Outcomes and results

We will conduct further work with regard to:

- making a difference by implementing what works;
- meeting high expectations and aspirations—in all aspects of student learning and community development;
- the school as a significant component of community development;
- pathways and effective transition processes;
- increased support for setting and meeting targets;
- monitoring, assessment and reporting of student achievement and outcomes;
- development and provision of real employment opportunities (e.g. through inter-agency cooperation);
- ensuring effective links between training and employment;
- enhancing current performance indicators (e.g. community/parent participation); and
- ongoing research and rigorous evaluation activity.

Examples of current good practice:

- 'Creating a Sense of Place'—National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) Report—Chris Robinson (08) 8333 8400.
- Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) Monitoring and Reporting Framework—Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Project (IESIP)—Peter Buckskin (02) 6240 7720.
- Improving Outcomes for Indigenous Students—Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) —Tracey Frigo (03) 9277 5688.
- 'Making a Difference' (NCVER Report)—Chris Robinson (08) 8333 8400.
- 'Succeeding Against the Odds'—National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) Report—Bob Boughton (08) 8951 7637.
- 'The School to Work Transition of Indigenous Australians'—L. White (02) 6240 9400.
- 'What Works?'—Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Project (IESIP) Evaluation Report—Joan Warhurst (02) 6260 5660.

Note

The initial content and thrust of this document was formulated during the final session of the national forum. All delegates were then invited to comment on two further drafts that were circulated subsequently by the Australian College of Education. As stated above, this is a working document to be refined and extended in a context of cooperative action.

Source

Unicorn, Vol. 25, No. 3, December 1999

Full contents of the journal, including other articles on indigenous education, can be accessed at www. austcolled.com.au

States of the Nation

ACT

The ACT Department of Education and Community Services has established a project to develop an ACT 0–8 early childhood document. The project is an initiative of the Children's Services branch.

The document, to be available throughout the ACT, will describe the progression of children's learning, emphasising socialisation, literacy and numeracy; and will provide teachers, child care staff, and parents with a common language to communicate with. This will build stronger partnerships between the range of settings and between parents, teachers, and colleagues.

The document aims to facilitate transitions for children between stages of children's services and between classrooms. It will also provide the context to put into practice contemporary theories of learning, and to promote developmentally, socially, and culturally appropriate learning opportunities for young children in the ACT.

NSW

A number of reviews and consultations are underway in NSW.

As a result of the introduction of the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*, children's services regulations are being reviewed. Comments are being sought on how children's services might best be regulated, particularly concerning issues such as probity testing of the management and operation of children's services, staffing qualifications, staff numbers and ratios, administration and management, the effectiveness of the present regulation, and recommendations for improvement and alternatives to statutory regulations.

The Department of Community Services is reviewing funding allocations to statewide and peak organisations providing support and resources to children's services. The review will assess the relevance of funding against the policy and funding objectives of the Children's Services Program; the relationship between direct services and resource and support, peak, and statewide services; the possible configuration of resource and support services to deliver improved outcomes for children, families, communities, and direct service providers; and the possible duplication with services provided/funded by other government agencies.

Consultations are being held on the draft *NSW Curriculum Framework for Children's Services*.

Northern Territory

A third innovative children's service was opened on April 17 in Galiwin'ku, an indigenous community located east of Darwin. The centre, officially opened by the Minister for Health, Family and Children's Services, will provide care for up to 32 young children, incorporating a program emphasising good health, early learning, cultural and language enrichment, and support for families.

Under the *Five-Year Children's Services Plan*, funding has been allocated to support the piloting of two comprehensive children's services in the Darwin and Alice Springs areas.

These services aim to better integrate preschool education with child care, provide a broader range of services for families from a single site, and provide higher levels of children's and families' well-being.

The 1999 *Re-Design of Curriculum Functions and Review of Assessment and Certification Task Group Report* stated recommendations concerning the development and implementation of curriculum in the Northern Territory. The NT curriculum framework will provide a structure around which schools can build flexible educational programs.

There will be two major phases of consultation; *Consultation Phase 1* involves schools responding to the initial components devised by the curriculum framework team after a thorough audit of other Australian state and territory curriculum frameworks. *Consultation Phase 2* will see a pilot document in schools by the beginning of Semester 1, 2001.

Queensland

There has been a great deal of legislative and proposed legislative change in Queensland over the past few months. The new *Child Protection Act* has been promulgated. This came out of the *Forde Report* into child abuse and provides more stringent reporting mechanisms and penalties.

The amendment to the *Child Care Act* regarding informal care has also been introduced into Parliament, placing restrictions on the number of children who can be cared for at any one time. The provider is also expected to have public liability insurance. Monitoring of informal care will occur only on a 'complaints' basis.

The new *Child Care Act and Regulation* is still under review. AECA Queensland Branch undertook an extensive mail-out to all members, highlighting areas of concern (including proposed staff qualifications, group size and age groupings, and adult-child ratio) and encouraging members to respond.

The Education Queensland document 2010 Discussion Paper was recently launched. The significance to preschool education is the proposed additional year of schooling highlighted in the document. The implications of this proposal are currently under government review.

This year's title for Under 8's Week was *Rainbow of Peace*, and included a variety of events focusing on young

children. A breakfast debate was held, giving practitioners the opportunity to discuss the Child Care Regulation.

South Australia

Since 1994 the South Australian Government has made a large financial commitment to the early years of education (0–8-year-olds). This commitment led to the development of a range of programs and resources to improve learning in the early years.

More than 400 site leaders, teachers, support staff, parents, and project officers have been given the opportunity to contribute to the evaluation of the early years strategy. The evaluation is focusing on the strategy as a whole and how the component parts have impacted on teaching and learning in the early years. Data collected from site visits, focus groups, interviews, telephone interviews, and a survey on the department's website is being compiled into a report for the chief executive and those working in the area.

David Engelhardt, former chief executive of the SA Community Housing Authority, has been appointed to the position of chief executive of Child and Youth Health. Mr Engelhardt has a distinguished background in community services and, with staff and board, is developing new visions for the organisation.

Tasmania

At the early childhood educators meeting on May 16, David Hanlon, director of the Tasmanian Office of Education, spoke to a gathering of early childhood care and teaching professionals. Mr Hanlon forecast some positive and innovative aspects designed to enhance early learning. He stated that at both the local and national level, the future allocation of resources to young children was likely to sustain a higher profile, with the possibility of a national strategy for the early years being put in place. Mr Hanlon was very optimistic about the future role of care and early education.

The Tasmanian Branch of AECA was well represented on the *Early Childhood Review* and on the consultative committee to establish the draft regulations for care.

Members of the branch donated two AECA publications to the Lady Gowrie Child Centre Library as a memorial to the late Di Cummins who worked so tirelessly for the association.

Victoria

The Victorian Labor Party has delivered its first budget. Education has been given priority and various measures are being introduced to address retention rates, cap class sizes in the early years, and upgrade assessment and testing.

Maureen Savage convened a special information forum on qualifications on May 16, and the quarterly (Victorian) Children's Services Forum was held on May 17. Discussions included issues surrounding the child care training packages and the creation of a registration board for early childhood practitioners.

Joan Waters' history of the 60 years of the Lady Gowrie Child Centre was also launched in May. Joan has completed a comprehensive study of changes occurring since the centre opened in 1939.

The Children's Hospital has completed producing material for child care centres on strategies for working with families. The resulting training video and materials for practitioners and parents are titled *Sharing a Picture of Children's Development: An Innovative New Program for Child Care*. All centres will receive the video and accompanying information. The video was launched at the Lady Gowrie.

The National Family Day Care Conference was hosted in Melbourne in June. Professor Anne Smith, from the Children's Issues Centre, Otago, New Zealand, addressed the conference and was a special guest at the AECA breakfast forum on *Children's Rights in the Year 2000* on June 19.

Western Australia

Members of the WA Branch participated in a number of forums conducted by the Department of Family and Children's Services and the Education Department on April 4. They met with Professor Alan Hayes and discussed the WA systems in relation to the OECD report on early education and care. Participants from the education, child care, health, and training sectors had opportunity to comment.

In late April, the WA Department of Training launched the new *Learning Guides* which will form part of the new national Diploma in Child Care.

At the recent WA state awards of the Australian Scholarships Group's *National Excellence in Teaching Awards (NEiTA)*, the WA Branch was happy to represent AECA. Acknowledgement was given to AECA's role in advocating the inclusion of awards for preschool and kindergarten teachers, presented for the first time this year. Congratulations to those early childhood teachers from around Australia who, along with Angela Drum and Jane Mereweather (WA), won state awards. Angela's award was for 'Developing an adaptable conflict resolution program and encouraging high self-esteem within the classroom'. Jane's award was for 'Fostering the spiritual, physical, emotional, intellectual, and social growth of students'.

Your child at play

The importance of play

Play is crucial for every child's development and education. It provides them with the skills and knowledge they need to prepare for adult life. Through play they learn to communicate, to build relationships, and to develop their coordination.

Play at Kindergym

Kindergym is a nationally and internationally recognised program based on the idea that movement is a 'special way of knowing'. The trained staff at Kindergym recognise the importance of play and offer quality gymnastics programs designed to develop coordination and self-esteem for children 0–5. The programs give children the opportunity to experience and learn through movement in a fun and safe environment.

Why gymnastics?

The gymnastics programs are coordinated and directed by qualified leaders throughout Australia. Each Kindergym, although differing in size, number of members, and management structures, maintains a basic philosophy and common objectives.

Gymnastics offers:

- movement based activities—balancing, sliding, climbing, rolling, etc.—which help children to develop coordination, confidence, creativity, and self-esteem;
- a wide range of fun, stimulating, and challenging equipment; and
- a chance for parents/caregivers and their child/children to play and learn together.

Play programs

Kindergym involves approximately 10 weekly sessions. The sessions run for between 45 minutes and one hour and coincide with school terms. Each session includes:

- warm-up;
- free play exploration on equipment;
- guided discovery;
- group time; and
- cool-down.

Children can participate in individual, partner, and group activities, and have fun with balls, bean bags, scarves, and streamers.

Music, games, songs, and dances are also incorporated into the program.

Parents and caregivers at Kindergym

Parents and caregivers are encouraged to participate actively in their child's experiences throughout the program. The Kindergym environment is constantly changed to stimulate the child's curiosity. And because children look for familiar things in order to feel comfortable enough to explore and experiment in the new surroundings, a familiar face and encouragement are important factors in whether they will be open to discovering new things.

Parents and carers are also encouraged to remain within an arm's length of their child to ensure their safety and security.

Through their involvement parents and caregivers:

- are responsible for the supervision and safety of their own child;
- share their child's fun and achievements;
- provide encouragement and positive reinforcement for the child;
- observe the child while at play;
- reinforce the values of an active lifestyle; and
- encourage a positive life-long attitude towards physical activity.

Quality time

Kindergym provides an opportunity for parents and caregivers to spend time with their child away from everyday distractions. They can observe the child's development and join in celebrating every achievement along the way.

Remember to follow up the ideas learned during the session. Games that can be played at home include:

- throwing and catching a ball;
- making streamers, shakers, and bean bags to play with;
- building a cubby by throwing a cloth over a table;
- practising balancing on a strip of tape on the floor; and
- playing peek-a-boo through a tunnel made by covering a chair with a blanket.

For more information about Kindergym please contact the gymnastic association in your state or territory.

ACT	(02) 6287 4350	NSW	(02) 9763 0177
NT	(08) 8927 9262	QLD	(07) 3245 6977
TAS	(03) 6278 2378	VIC	(03) 9650 3877
WA	(08) 9383 7355	SA	(08) 8294 8288
Kindergym SA	(08) 8267 5856		

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Accolades

ASG Awards for Excellence in Teaching

In May and June this year, at the regional Australian Scholarships Group (ASG) *National Excellence in Teaching Awards (NEiTA)*, 10 early childhood teachers were recognised for their contributions to children and their families. A total of 2,430 teachers Australia-wide were nominated by their students, schools, and class parents. This number includes 403 nominations for early childhood teachers. The winners were presented with a commemorative plaque and curriculum materials for their preschool or service. Winners of the regional awards become eligible to enter the national awards, to be held in April 2001. Five early childhood teachers will be awarded grants for professional development.

This is the first time the NEiTA awards have extended to include the early childhood sector. This inclusion was coordinated in consultation with AECA. For more information about the awards, ASG can be contacted on 1300 367 777.

Graduation Ceremony

Macquarie University, Division of Early Childhood and Education

The Macquarie University's Institute of Early Childhood 1999 graduation ceremony was held on April 18, 2000. The awards were presented by the Head of the Divison, Professor Alan J. Hayes, BA *NSW*, PhD, FAPsS.

Judith Dickson was awarded a PhD. The title of her thesis was *TAFE Child Care graduates go to university—their first year experience*. Judith gave an address on behalf of her fellow graduates. Wendy Lindgren was awarded a Master of Education and Work.

Sir John Leslie Carrick, KCMG, BEc *Syd*., HonDLilt *Syd*., Hon FACE, was awarded the Degree of Doctor of Letters *honoris causa*, in recognition of his enormous contribution to early childhood in Australia. Sir John delivered an address to mark the occasion.

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- reflect the diversity of AECA membership
- provide opportunities to listen, discuss and debate current issues and trends
- support current and relevant Australian research in early childhood care and education
- make recommendations that will inform future AECA policy direction

For further information visit the AECA website and follow the links at

http://www.aeca.org.au

or contact the Conference Convenor

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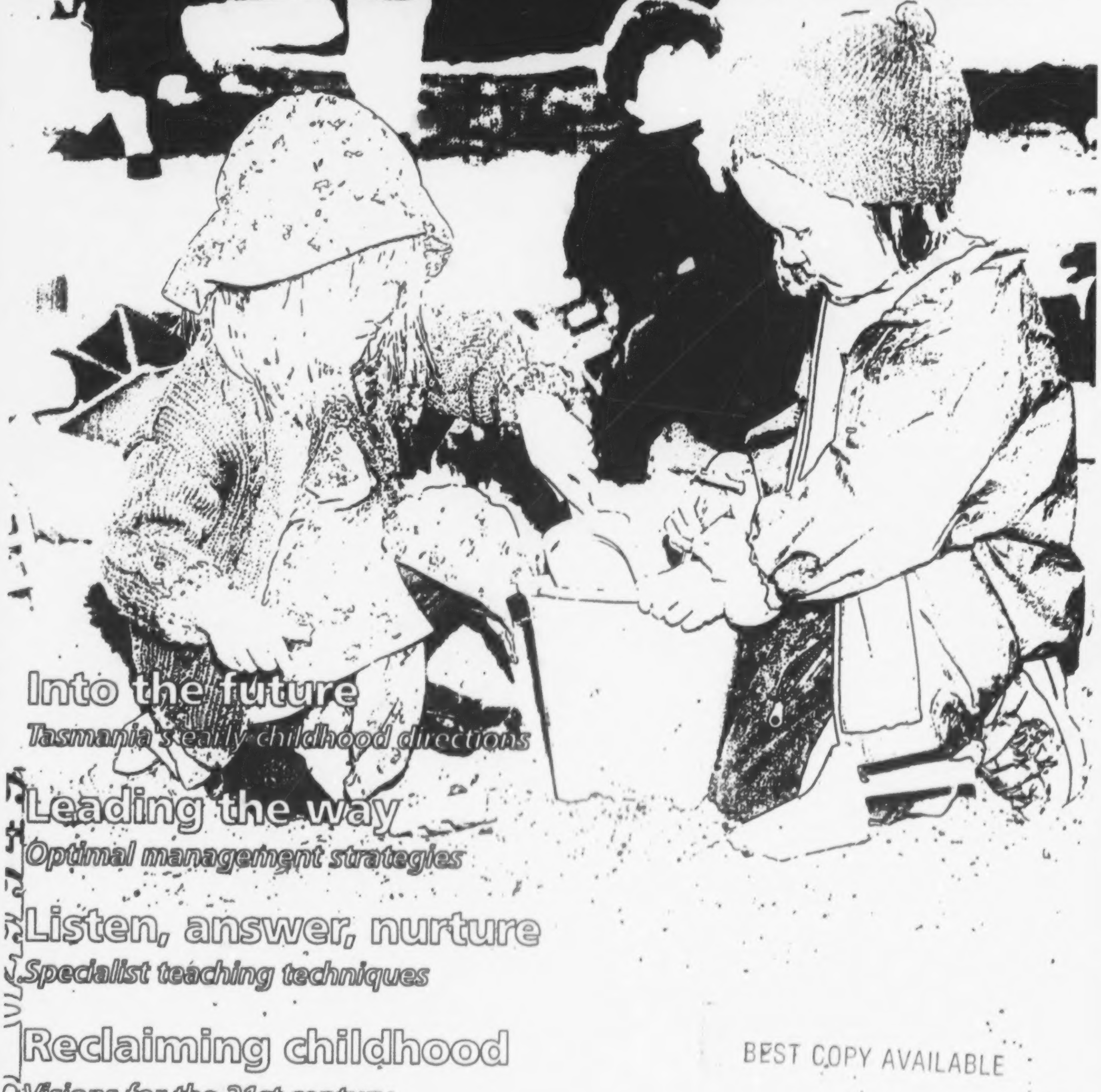

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An Australian magazine focusing on the needs of children from 0–8 years

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The Australian Early Childhood Association Inc. (AECA) is a leading specialist publisher of early childhood literature. It is a national peak non government organisation acting in the interests of young children aged 0-8, and for older children in outside school hours care. It actively promotes the provision of high quality services for all young children and their families and supports the important role of parents in caring for their children. AECA is also the national umbrella organisation for Children's Services and sees this task as supporting the advocacy role of the child care sector as a whole, without undermining the rights of each specialist organisation to operate and speak independently.

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***Every Child* Volume 6 No. 3 Spring 2000**

Teaching young children Specialist or not?

Young children have an enormous capacity for learning, and spend their first years observing and constructing meaning from the world around them. In this article, Glenda MacNaughton explains why young children, who learn so readily by themselves, need teachers with specialist techniques. The debate lies in how young children are viewed by the adults around them, and what techniques are required to nurture and encourage young children's desire to learn.

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Visions of children and childhood

Technological and social changes over the past few decades have dramatically changed the way we educate and care for our children. As our lives become increasingly busy, it can be very easy to lose sight of the visions we have for our children's future. Alison Elliott uncovers three different visions for childhood, and explores how we can help young children fully experience the freedom and joy of childhood.

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Leadership and management
Into the 21st century

The early childhood field is entering a time of change and challenge, and there is much to learn about optimising administration and management methods for early care and education. Technology, changing concepts, demographic shifts, and welfare and education reform services keep us all on the learning curve. In this issue of *Every Child*, Hanna Nupponen discusses the leadership styles that will allow us to successfully navigate these changes, and meet the growing needs of children, families, and child care staff.

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Into the future
Early childhood education in Tasmania

Children's early experiences in care and education are crucial for their later wellbeing and success. In light of this, the Tasmanian Department of Education recently reviewed its early childhood education systems. The review took account of national and international research, as well as the opinions of parents, teachers, and carers on current issues relating to early childhood education and care. In this article, Jenni Connor discusses the findings of the review, and reveals the future directions of curriculum, learning outcomes, and the organisation of early schooling in Tasmania.

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Focus on families

A new vision for children

Families are at the very heart of Australian life, and children are an integral part of families.

The Commonwealth Government's vision is for an Australia where families and communities are resilient, capable, and resourceful, and where communities meet the needs of their members.

The Government, in partnership with state and local governments, business and community sectors, is working to give children the opportunity to fully participate in society, and to give marriages and family relationships the best chance of succeeding.

I believe that the importance of a child's early years in determining future life chances cannot be underestimated.

For this reason, the Commonwealth Government is investing in early parenting education and services for families with children. We are providing marriage and relationship education, ensuring better access to services, and focusing on prevention and early intervention—especially for children at risk. Our aim is to strengthen and support families, and minimise the negative impacts of relationship breakdown and family violence.

Existing international research indicates how important early childhood experiences are to outcomes in later life. A soon-to-be conducted longitudinal study of Australian children and their families, which I announced in the latest Budget, will provide valuable information to help Australian families provide good outcomes. With this information, policy-makers will be able to develop effective early intervention and prevention strategies in the areas of health, education, care, and family support.

Child care is an integral part of the *Stronger Families and Communities Strategy*.

I recognise that child care can provide valuable assistance to families, helping children to socialise and allowing parents to balance their work and family commitments.

The role of child care extends beyond practical care, as it provides resources for parents such as education and links to other services.

Our aim is to strengthen and support families

The Quality Improvement and Accreditation System in long day care, and the extending of the quality assurance system for family day care and outside school hours care, strengthen the early childhood development focus of child care services. This ensures the quality of child care and gives parents confidence that their children benefit from child care.

The affordability, flexibility, and accessibility of child care is also crucial to the Government's commitment to helping parents. We are committed to providing services designed to match the diversity of family life, that are able to support families in their choices and be part of a community's social infrastructure.

This approach is exemplified by two projects which recently received Commonwealth funding.

A flexible family and children's centre is being constructed on Bathurst Island. It will provide long day care for preschool-age children, after school and vacation care for primary school-age children, nutrition programs, children's health monitoring, day patrol to encourage attendance at school, and a family and parenting program.

In Townsville, the *Young Families Support Project* is providing a creative early intervention and prevention service for young parents who are facing possible family breakdown or the risk of drug dependency. We are working in partnership with a number of government agencies to support groups of families when they are most vulnerable, and when their children can benefit most.

Finally, in order to continue meeting the needs of families and children in the years to come, I have asked the Commonwealth Child Care Advisory Council to work on a vision for child care for 2001 and beyond.

In this role, the council is consulting with parents, service providers and community members on a vision that will provide a sound basis for guiding future directions.

© Senator Jocelyn Newman
Federal Minister for Family and Community Services

SHAPING EARLY CHILDHOOD FUTURES

Visions for children, families, and communities

As Australia basks in the hype and glory of the Olympic Games, it's easy to forget the fundamentals that lead individuals, organisations, and communities to strive for success and quality outcomes in all areas of endeavour.

Reaching peak performance in the sporting arena requires clear goals and vision; supported by focus, commitment, and initiative.

In other arenas as well, quality outcomes are dependent on a clear vision and mission, well-defined goals, and a strong commitment to achievement and quality.

In the early childhood arena, supporting the best quality care and education for young children and their families is not easy. As families become increasingly socially, culturally, and ethnically diverse, with different beliefs and aspirations, so too are their visions for their children and their requirements of services. In this new century, I suspect that our visions of what is best for children and families, and hence our service types, will become increasingly diverse to cater for the differing needs of communities, family lifestyles, and niche groups within communities. The 'one-model-fits-all' will give way to a multiplicity of service types to meet the varying needs of particular groups.

Does our community want a situation where children's learning needs are constrained by the ability of a business or community to pay for qualified staff or resources?

Important research on brain development and the contributions of early experience to later learning underscores the need for diversity in philosophy and programming approaches. Importantly, too, parents are increasingly conscious of their influential roles as children's first educators, and strive to ensure that early education options complement and support their family values, goals, and environment.

However, in governments' quests for ways to curtail the cost of early childhood care and education, and develop regulatory and accreditation systems for the 'one-size-fits-all' model, there are dangers of decreasing service quality.

The recent development of 'early learning centres' reflects renewed emphasis on the importance of preschool experiences to later academic success, recognition of the receptivity of the brain to early social and educational experiences, and the importance of good beginnings in literacy and numeracy. In many independent schools, 'early learning centres' are being developed to ensure excellence in education and continuity of experience, philosophy, and tradition for all students aged three to 18.

Some school sectors recognise and celebrate the value of specialist early childhood educators and employ these experts in their early childhood classes. In other sectors it is often believed that a generalist primary school teacher can teach anything and everything.

My concern is that we are in danger of institutionalising a huge structural gulf between the early childhood experiences of the rich and the rest. While the wealthier schools and families are investing in the best early childhood expertise money can buy, many centres are cutting back on trained early childhood teachers and support staff, and are employing more untrained and unqualified staff. To make matters worse, licensing requirements seem to condone these cut-backs.

Does our community want a situation where children's learning needs are constrained by the ability of a business or community to pay for qualified staff or resources? Clearly, there is a major equity issue here.

Equity in quality and outcome is an ideological issue that families, policy-makers and governments must grapple with lest there now develop a twin system of centres with limited or poorly qualified staff in less-affluent communities; and well-qualified and resourced staff in wealthier communities.

In this issue of *Every Child*, we touch on some of the qualities and visions that make individuals and early childhood services successful. Our articles provide thought-provoking material, and challenge us all to move 'outside the square' in our visions and goals for young children and early childhood service provision.

Alison Elliott

TEACHING YOUNG CHILDREN

SPECIALIST OR NOT?

Early childhood is a special time in most people's lives because it is when we begin to learn how to:

- use the power of language and engage with the social meanings and values of the world around us;
- use our bodies to express feelings, construct things in the world about us, and experience the pleasures and challenges of movement;
- think about ourselves, other people, and our immediate environment;
- use and experience emotions; and
- build and break friendships.

It is a time of intense learning and feeling, when much of what we encounter is new, when we want to play with the world about us to make sense of it, and when we innovate, create, and imagine with joy. We work hard to make sense of what we see and what is expected of us.

Much of what we learn in these early years comes from astute observation of our world, and our extraordinary capacity to make meaning from all we see, hear, touch, and feel. Consider the comments by Chloe, a preschool child who explained to me what she had learned about bosses from a video:

Researcher: *What do you get to do when you are the boss?*

Chloe: *You get to do a lot of things see. If you want to get something right you have got to do it yourself. Cos, that was, um, when I was watching the video* Ninja Turtles *and that bat start was a friend of Shredda—he's a bad guy Shredd—I have to do everything myself.*

Chloe taught herself about bosses by actively making sense of what she saw on the video.

If children learn so readily by themselves, do they need teachers with specialist techniques? How we answer that question depends on how we view young children. Jenkins (1993) argued that there are four ways adults view children:

- as possessions;
- as developmental subjects;
- as participants; and
- as citizens.

Children as possessions

Learning what we want them to know

When children are viewed as adult possessions they have no rights other than those we give them. Their learning is controlled by us, and is for our benefit rather than theirs. From this perspective, teachers need specialist techniques to ensure that children learn what we want them to learn, for instance, to be literate, numerate, and technologically competent. As Spodek (1987, p.5) reminds us:

> *Early childhood education, like all education, is a deliberate intervention in the lives of young children. It results from a belief that children growing up naturally might not come to know all the things we want them to know.*

Children as developmental subjects

Learning when we think they are ready

When children are viewed as developmental subjects they need adult protection. In this view of childhood, built through the theories of developmental psychology, '... children are perceived as dependent and incompetent, and therefore requiring protection from and within the adult world' (Lloyd-Smith & Tarr, 2000, p.65).

Children are seen as limited by their age and level of development. From this perspective, teachers need specialist techniques to ensure that children's learning is developmentally appropriate. Indeed, using specialist developmental techniques can produce lasting gains for children throughout the later years of schooling (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1993).

Children as participants

Learning to voice their views

When children are viewed as participants in their social world rather than subject to it by their developmental limits, a different argument emerges for teaching techniques. As participants in the adult world, children have the right to be involved in decisions about teaching and learning. Teachers need specialist techniques to encourage children to voice their views about what they should learn and how, and to answer children in a meaningful way. Specialist techniques are needed because young children's experiences as active participants are limited. They need help, advice, and support to build their capacity and desire to be heard.

Children as citizens

Learning the right to choose and act

A final set of arguments for specialist early childhood teaching techniques arises if we view the child as a citizen. A citizen is 'one who has the right to choose and to take action independently' (Lloyd-Smith & Tarr, 2000, p.69). From this perspective, specialist techniques are needed to empower children to exercise their rights to choose what and how they learn, and to act in their classrooms independently of the teacher.

Why do children need specialist early childhood teachers?

We can build four arguments about why we need specialist teachers and teaching techniques in early childhood. They help us to:

- enhance and support young children's learning;
- build developmental programs;
- build young children's capacity to be heard; and
- support young children's rights to choose and to act.

To date, we in early childhood have relied strongly on developmental arguments to shape our place in the broader community. In this millennium, we still lament that our work is undervalued and of low status. Maybe it is time to rethink how we view our work, and maybe others will rethink how they view us. As one teacher explained, just 'doing the same things over' is not enough.

> *They (teachers) need to be people who really care about what they're doing, and that the way they're doing it is the best for the children. I'd like to think that the majority of practitioners would say that they do. But some people do the same things over and over and never actually look and think about what they're doing, and who this is advantaging.* (Teacher interview, 1999)

Young children deserve specialist early childhood teachers. However, teachers' claims to expertise should rest on their expertise in listening, answering, respecting, and supporting the desire young children have to learn and to be part of our social world. What might be gained if early childhood teachers claimed to be specialists in empowerment and the creation of an active citizenry, rather than developmental specialists?

The techniques they need to do this are varied but should acknowledge that:

- children have a right to excellent teaching;
- teaching is complex and dynamic;
- teaching is interventionist;
- teaching is value-based;
- there is no single correct way to optimise learning;
- teaching needs careful and critical reflection;
- timing teaching well is important;
- anti-discriminatory principles and practices are key to good teaching;
- teaching occurs in a diverse range of settings, including child care. (MacNaughton & Williams, 1998)

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Supporting learning

Early childhood teaching expertise involves mediating activity in ways that enhance overall child development, and specifically, the development of flexible and diverse capabilities in children's brains.

Importantly, teaching expertise means empowering young children to develop the understandings, skills, strategies, and dispositions that will set them on the path to lifelong learning. From neurodevelopmental studies we know that a young child's brain is malleable to experience and is most plastic in the early years. Hence the need to support activation of key neural systems in the brain through rich, stimulating, and targeted learning environments.

Experience provides the organising frameworks for the brain. Different regions of the brain require specific experiences as functions develop, e.g. visual input during the organisation of the visual system.

Learning is usually facilitated by environmental interactivity together with expert guidance. Certain techniques can boost young children's development of cognitive and metacognitive mechanisms during learning. These techniques help children build their own intellectual structures, and help them regulate their cognitive processing.

When teachers guide or mediate children's activities, they support children in their thinking. This reduces some of the burden of cognitive processing, allowing children to focus on achieving specific outcomes. Gradually, the support provided by teachers becomes internalised.

Mediated learning involves teaching strategies such as goal identification, active monitoring, explaining, peer tutoring, discussion, and reasoning. Teachers provide cues and questions, and model and demonstrate skills and strategies to be learned. The focus is on extending children's knowledge by rectifying discrepancies between an individual's response and the ideal situation, through encouraging risk in problem-solving, and by demonstrating an idealised version of the outcome, skill, or solution.

Empowering learning means that rather than leaving development to chance, we consciously and explicitly assist children in their activities and use the language of the 'discipline' appropriately and in context. Enriching children's experience supports development of specific brain functions and regions. Hence, children must have rich experiences and the opportunity to talk through and about them. *AE*

Visions of children and childhood

Few people remain untouched by the innocence, wonder, and magic of young children. Often though, we get so caught up in the immediacy of our children's day-to-day needs that we lose sight of the bigger picture—where we're heading as a community, and how we see the future of children and, more generally, of childhood.

The future of the world lies with our children, but they need us to make that future safe, peaceful, and caring.

Asking people to stop for a moment and think about the big picture can be challenging. As families are increasingly diverse socially, culturally, and ethnically, so too are their visions and hopes for their children. But at the core lie hopes and dreams that transcend culture and place.

To gain some insights into views of childhood and children's futures, I asked three educators—each with key roles in children's development—about their visions for children and childhood. Each person is an 'educator', though not an 'early childhood' educator in the traditional sense. Each cares deeply about children and their futures and has an influential role in shaping the lives of young people. Importantly, these views are representative of our community and reflect the types of considerations that must inform our visions for children.

Woven through these visions was the notion that adults must help children recapture the spontaneity of childhood; 'live the dream' of a world where people coexist in peace and harmony; and empower children to build a caring and respectful society.

Dr June Slee is a special educator who works with young children and families, as well as with young people in the juvenile justice system. Not surprisingly, she has a somewhat pessimistic view of the future of childhood and fears that it is 'regressing to the situation of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, where children were regarded as miniature adults, and not as children *per se*'.

And while our children are spared working in mines, factories, and mills, she contends that 'many are under similar pressure to perform—not to contribute to their current financial standing, but to ensure a sound financial status in the future'. She adds:

> *Many children have a timetable crammed with activities outside school hours. Anxious parents devise tight schedules that involve extra tutoring: ancillary lessons such as music, maths, and foreign languages. This parental pressure for children to succeed extends to the sporting field as well, as any sideline spectator on any oval at weekends will attest.*
>
> *But I guess the child under pressure to succeed is the fortunate one … I often think of Hogarth's* Gin Lane *when I look at kids today. More are born to parents with some form of drug addiction. Many live in unhappy violent homes, anaesthetised only by the greater intensity of the violence they observe on television.*
>
> *I wonder if the baby boomers were the last kids to walk long distances to school free of fear, to do chores before and after school as a responsible family member, and to spend long hours away from home playing with friends with the approval of caring parents?*
>
> *Childhood is no longer a time of innocence but, as in past centuries, has become a time when some children are over-protected, and some are under-protected, and few have it just right. I can't see the situation improving. In fact, I think that in the future the baby boomers will be acknowledged as those people who 'had a childhood'.*

While sharing some of Dr Slee's pessimistic views of children's futures, John Finlay, change and technology expert from the team at Zing Technology at the Australian Technology Park in Sydney, is more optimistic and hopeful:

> *Despite the huge increase in knowledge over the past 1000 years, citizens of planet earth seem collectively unable to deal with the world's most wicked problems … racial, sexual, and religious hatreds; poverty; genocide; war; disease; global warming; mass extinction of other species … We start out life with good intentions, open minds and great hopes, and within a few short years the lights go out … We are socialised into the same patterns of behaviour as our parents … and destined to relive their mistakes.*
>
> *Would it not be wonderful if that great flowering of learning that takes place*

> *when we are very young … when we learn to walk and talk … could continue as we grow older?*
>
> *Perhaps we need to change some of the assumptions about young people. Too often we see them as empty vessels to be filled up with our old knowledge. But that knowledge is contaminated with our baggage. What if we were to regard our children as important, newly arrived guests, and offer them a very respectful welcome to a world in which their naive wisdom and still unfettered capability for learning is more highly valued as a planetary resource?*

To understand more about John's visions for young people, read *The Littlest Cosmic Cloud*, at http://www.anyzing.com/fsone/Cosmic1.htm

The future of the world lies with our children

Finally, I asked Margo Harris, from the Australian Multiple Birth Association—and mother of triplets—about her hope for the future of her children.

Primarily, Margo wants her children to be happy and successful:

> *My children need to have respect for themselves and show respect for others; be caring and considerate. My husband and I need to guide them towards these outcomes. Being a parent is not easy (what an understatement!). Often you are not sure you are doing it right, a little like an experiment, a big life experiment! And, one that has huge consequences! We nurture our children and are role models. We all have traits we don't want to pass to our children and have done things that we don't want our children to do—so being a role model is a big challenge.*
>
> *As a parent I aim to assist our children with the skills and knowledge to achieve their own goals and/or vision. They need a balance of interdependence, dependence, and independence.*
>
> *Steven Covey, in* The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, *talks of having a balance in life of spouse, family, money, work, possession, enemy, church, and self. No one or two should really take over. This balance makes for an overall happiness. And what more do we want for our children, or for that matter, ourselves?*
>
> *In the process of realising the visions, my children need an abundance of positive life experiences, and the character to appropriately treat the not-so-pleasant experiences in life. I want them to be aware of, and appreciate, the broad spectrum of life. They need a positive attitude, considerate of other people and alternate ideas. Part of being a parent is teaching your child about life, and being a life mentor.*

Given societal changes over the past decades, Margo believes that although her children are growing up in a very different environment to the one she grew up in, her parents probably had a similar overall vision for her. She adds:

> *But the process to obtain that vision has changed a lot—the pressures of life, the things you have control over and the things you can't control. And we cannot overlook the changes in technology (probably a word not used much in my early days). Now there are more possibilities as children's lives evolve; equally there are many uncertainties.*
>
> *I would like my children to enjoy school, do reasonably well and obtain a rewarding job. I often think a transportable job where they can travel the world would be good. The current trend of changing jobs and/or careers more often will probably be more the norm.*

These visions for children send a strong message to early childhood educators. Only through joining together and building thoughtful programs, and through staying in touch with our own childhood, can we help children discover a world full of hope, promise, and peace. Realising dreams, and respecting and celebrating the joys and magic of childhood are visions that should guide all of us in early childhood education.

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Exploring childhood

Some time ago, US educator Jonathon Silin's reflections on childhood were published in *Every Child* (Vol. 3, No. 3, Spring 1997, pp. 6–7). He commented that images of our own childhood are a dynamic part of our current life.

> *Teachers have a unique drive to explore this imaginary homeland called childhood. For in each of its provinces is an image of the good childhood, that which we want for all children. These images inform our daily interactions with children. They cause us to value particular activities, ways of being, and modes of apprehending the world.*
>
> *Childhood is continuously present yet forever lost. With time, memories fade, facts are confused, history intervenes. It is difficult to sort out what we remember, what has been described to us by parents, and what we learn from the old photographs, report cards, and first attempts at writing carefully stored in attic trunks.*
>
> *Because memory is never pure, always coloured by successive layers of experience, it can not offer a direct route to the past. What we can learn are the emotional truths of childhood rather than literal facts. But it is these truths that connect us most deeply to the past and to the present of our own children.*

In thinking about our children's present and future lives, staying in touch with our own childhood seems important, he says.

> *Attending to the emotions that run beneath the surface of our stories, we are better able to relate to children whose outward circumstances may be different from our own. We can then help students who are very different from each other join together. Only through sharing their lives and studying the world they know can a group of children become a community of caring learners.*

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Into the 21st century

What is leadership?

Leadership has been defined as 'knowing what the next step is, and having the confidence and commitment to take it' (Sarros, Butchasky & Santora, 1996, p.42), and as 'a process that ranges from the avoidant through to the transactional, to the inspirational, idealized and transformational' (Avolio, 1996, p.6). Leaders are also said to engage with followers to achieve specific goals which the leader and followers wish to achieve.

Leadership, then, is not only concerned with specific style and technique, but also with the quality of relationships between the leader and followers. This involves working with and through other people to achieve organisational goals.

For some time, people have been asking—is leadership inherited, or is it a skill that can be learned? To date, there is no clear definition. At times it is important to have intelligence, while at other times experience is needed, reflecting Hayden's (1999) argument about situational leadership. Hayden talks about management and leadership interchangeably. He comments that managers need to become versed in applying different styles and different ways of dealing with staff members at different times.

Leadership has been defined as the ability to communicate vision and influence. It has been described as a process where a group of people, together, set standards and expectations that ultimately influence the actions of others, leading to 'desirable action'. In centre-based child care the 'desirable action' is the provision of high-quality services within the community. A substantial body of literature has supported the proposition that certain conditions within an early childhood setting impact on quality of care. These findings imply that the way an early childhood centre is led and managed strongly determines the quality of care and contributes to the level of job satisfaction for the director and staff.

Leaders may be appointed, or they may emerge from within a group because of their ability to influence others and to go beyond the actions commanded by formal authority. Leaders in educational settings must also be able to manage, since they are often required to allocate resources, deal with budgets, etc., in order to move the organisation toward its vision.

The key function of a leader is to create an organisational vision, mission, or agenda. The key function of a manager is to implement this vision. If we take this view, then effective leaders should also be effective managers, or at the very least be supported by proficient managers. It has been argued that tomorrow's leaders and managers will be the same: visionary, building a climate of trust, learning from mistakes, creating a healthy and empowering environment, flexible, adaptive, decentralised, and creating learning organisations.

Transformational leadership

Transformational leaders motivate their followers to perform well. They also develop the skills of the followers to allow them to make their own decisions, thereby enabling them to take greater ownership of, and responsibility for, their surroundings. There is also growing evidence that female managers demonstrate behaviours consistent with transformational styles of leadership. Recent research (Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Teaching [ACIRRT], 1996) shows that, of the 71,000 or so child-care workers employed in Commonwealth-funded services, more than 90 per cent were women. And, from my own experience in the child care industry (11 years), the majority of child care directors and teaching staff are female. In the US, approximately three million child care teachers, family child care providers, and assistants care for 10 million children each day. Ninety-seven per cent of the care providers are female (*Child Care Bulletin*, 1997). Therefore, transformational leadership theory may have relevance in these settings.

Transformational leaders are described as having strong vision and sense of mission, and as being individually considerate. These leaders are able to diagnose, delegate, and coach. Transformational leadership involves activities that allow people to make sense of what is happening within the group; that is, leadership is the social sense-making process that enhances interpersonal influence. This is emphasised by Bottery (1992) when he discusses nine criteria within a new leadership model i.e. leadership must be: critical, transformative, visionary, educative, empowering, liberating, personally ethical, organisationally ethical, and responsible.

Leadership must be critical because, ultimately, it must improve the working environment and the lives of the employees. This can happen only by looking at the status quo, and analysing what changes are needed. Consequently, leadership is transformative, educative, and visionary in order to implement change, improve current conditions, and build a vision for the future. Transformational leadership raises the awareness of those within the organisation, enabling them to see their own position and influence decision-making toward organisational change. Moreover, by treating people with respect, and recognising their valuable contribution to the decision-making processes, transformational leaders focus on developing a democratic community that is ethical at both personal and organisational levels (Bottery, 1992).

This research shows that good leaders are continuously offering support and encouragement. Effective leadership is based on mutual trust and loyalty, working in partnerships with organisational members, and promoting higher levels of productivity. Staff need to know that they are valued for their efforts. A supportive supervisor is open, honest, and offers regular feedback respectful of the individual's ideas and self-worth. Leadership is referred to as a 'social meaning-making process', resulting from a group of people engaged in collective activity. Within this model, people connect to each other and develop a culture that stems from 'communities of practice'. Leadership is seen as a social process that includes all members in the community.

Conclusion

Leadership and management processes as described are vital components of a high-quality early childhood program. As Hayden (1999) argues, directors in early childhood settings are currently facing enormous challenges in keeping their staff motivated and developing creative and innovative programs in the midst of economic and political change. Leaders in early childhood need to be aware that their role is more than routine management, and that successful leaders are more than efficient managers (Rodd, 1994). A person with highly developed management skills is likely to have structured the administration of the program to give themselves adequate time to devote to the key leadership functions.

Through numerous surveys of practising managers in early childhood centres, it has become evident that the 'human functions' of dealing with staffing issues seem to pose the greatest challenge for directors of early childhood centres. If we are serious about valuing our children, maximising life chances, and enriching our society, then clearly members of the field need opportunities to develop organisational and team-building skills. Leaders in this field will need to deepen their understanding of their roles in the larger community, and consider a national vision for the early childhood years.

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Leadership strategies that work

Leadership is about shaping visions and actions, decision-making, and focusing on the improvement of inputs, processes, and outputs.

Effective leaders keep goals in sight, and align efforts and actions to vision. Goals and programs of action that reflect shared values and vision create great unity and commitment among a team. People are much more committed to something they have developed.

We have different spheres of leadership—home, work, and social. Leadership guru Steven Covey has seven principles for successful leadership that can operate on a variety of levels and in a range of contexts—from our families to our workplaces:

1. *Be proactive, and everything else will follow.* Take the initiative and the responsibility to make things happen. Be resourceful.
2. *Begin with the end in mind.* Begin where you want to end up and keep core values and vision in sight.
3. *Put first things first.* Then, make sure you are well organised and plan and execute according to priorities. Seize opportunies and make things happen.
4. *Think win/win.* See decision-making as a cooperative—rather than competitive—exercise, and develop agreements and solutions that make all parties feel good.
5. *Seek first to understand, then be understood.* Covey's fifth principle is to understand the context and the needs of people within it. Listen with empathy and strive to understand differences in perceptions.
6. *Synergise.* This simply means the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, and everything is related to everything else.
7. *Sharpen the saw.* This refers to renewing and enhancing the greatest asset you have: you. It's about renewing the self—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Make time to ensure that you are well cared for. No leadership strategy will work well if you are tired, stressed, or in poor health. *AE*

Into the future

Early childhood education in Tasmania

In late 1998, the Tasmanian Department of Education commenced a review of early childhood. As child care services had recently come under the department's responsibility, the review attempted to include issues relevant to both education and care sectors.

Dr Glenda MacNaughton, from the Department of Learning and Educational Development, University of Melbourne, led the review. Dr MacNaughton was asked to facilitate initial local consultation, and also to review the national and international research on current issues and debates in early childhood education and care. A set of questions in the areas of curriculum, learning outcomes, teaching, and the organisation of early schooling guided her work.

One of the strengths of the review was its focus on research as the basis for consultation and action. Dr MacNaughton and her colleague Karina Davis produced two discussion papers for staff and parents on possible ways forward. The documents suggested that future directions should be based on seven principles, i.e. (1) curriculum is based on partnerships between key stakeholders; (2) stakeholders should produce broad curriculum guidance for early childhood; (3) early childhood professionals are reflective 'curriculum artists'; (4) curriculum excellence is guaranteed by professional enterprise; (5) investment builds professional enterprise; (6) evaluation occurs through research and documentation; and (7) system-wide change builds through supporting local partnerships and enterprise.

Response to the review

More than 1200 responses were received. These indicated widespread agreement that children's early experiences in care and education are crucial for their later wellbeing and success, and there is a strong commitment to providing a 'quality start' for all young children in Tasmania.

Because forums and cluster groups were the mechanism for public consultation, most responses reflected the combined opinions of teachers, carers, parents, and school principals.

This cross-sector conversation began a process of enthusiastic communication between staff working in child care, kindergartens, and the early years of schooling. It also regenerated professional discussion and debate about what is in the best educational and care interests of young children.

General directions

There was a remarkable consensus between the stakeholders' and respondents' views, and current thinking and research in early childhood.

- The majority of submissions urged the Department to move towards a 'partnership approach' to curriculum development for the early childhood years. Such an approach would value the opinions of all stakeholders—parents and early childhood professionals—about what a curriculum for young children should contain.
- Writers suggested that these partnership groups should be used to build a broad and flexible framework for an early years' curriculum.
- Writers strongly supported professional development initiatives to assist this framework development and to maintain and extend the competence of early childhood professionals.
- Respondents endorsed the seven principles relating to partnerships and recognition and support for a high level of professionalism among the early childhood workforce.

The framework

Respondents said that the framework should:

- be flexible enough to accommodate local needs;
- recognise the central place of guided play as one of young children's ways of learning;
- give priority to self-esteem, social skills, and healthy emotional development, both as key goals for children in the birth to eight age range, and as an essential foundation for all future learning;
- adjust expectations for early literacy and numeracy outcomes as children grow and develop;
- develop appropriate assessment tools to monitor young children's learning;
- take a birth to eight focus to describe children's literacy and numeracy learning in home, child care, and school settings;
- encourage varied teaching methods

to support children's changing needs and capabilities in literacy and numeracy;

- recognise the role of science and technology in building children's capacity to think logically, solve problems, and investigate their world; and
- value the contribution the arts and creativity make to children's capacity to construct and represent meaning from their experiences.

The detailed picture

The full picture of the responses is available at www.doe.tased.edu.au/ooe/publicat.htm

A synopsis of responses to some other major issues follows:

Curriculum

There are certainly changing expectations about what and how young children should learn. One speaker said that when she first started working in child care 20 years ago, 'parents just wanted to make sure their children were given lunch and looked after in a safe and secure environment. Now they want to see the program'.

Learning outcomes

The outcomes most consistently valued by early childhood staff were social skills/self-esteem and emotional development. Other skills mentioned consistently included motor, communication, and numeracy skills.

Parents valued social skills and literacy highly as outcomes of early education. However, parents also listed numerous other areas as important. The list included fun and enjoyment of learning, learning to be a member of a group, communication skills, problem-solving, creativity, and skills for life-long learning.

Structural issues

Comments on structural issues came from 177 correspondents. The two issues that received greatest attention were: the age at which children should start school; and class size and its effects on children's learning and development.

Most respondents preferred a uniform school entrance age policy. They argued that a uniform starting age was fair, and that observing a consistent policy would lessen the stress on schools to vary enrolments under local pressure.

There was recognition that teachers are better able to respond to individual children's needs and to deal with learning problems early if class sizes are kept manageable in the first years of school. A maximum of 20 students was recommended for kindergarten and prep (four- and five-year-olds), and 25 for Years 1 and 2.

Ways forward

Action arising from the review's recommendations falls into five categories: (1) partnerships between parents, carers, and teachers; (2) a framework for learning and developing, birth to age eight; (3) professional learning opportunities for practitioners in care and education; (4) research into models, programs, and strategies that work with young children; (5) structural change to the entry age and a commitment to improving adult/child ratios in early years classes.

The implementation of these changes is to be introduced in phases.

The draft should be available by early 2001, when a group of schools and centres will work to refine, implement, and develop supporting material for the framework.

In collaboration with Melbourne University, the Department of Education has applied for a major industry research grant. Other school-based action research projects are in train, also utilising a range of academic research partners. A uniform entrance age to kindergarten of four years on January 1 of the enrolling year has been declared for all schools—government and non-government—and implementation issues are being addressed. The department is also investigating ways to reduce teacher-student ratios.

The early childhood community in Tasmania—parents, carers, and teachers—is impressed by this high level of early commitment, and eagerly awaits further developments in the near future.

Jenni Connor
Principal Project Officer
Department of Education, Tasmania

South Australian perspective: Early childhood education for the future

The review of early childhood by the Tasmanian Department of Education provides a contrast to recent directions in South Australia. We have been undergoing a 'reform' of our curriculum documents, but the process has been very different.

In 1999, we were informed that a new curriculum framework was to be developed. Entitled the South Australian Curriculum, Standards and Accountability Framework (SACSAF), it would encompass curriculum from birth to 18 years. After a strictly controlled trialling and consultation period, the new framework should be ready for implementation in 2001.

As an early childhood educator working in the preschool sector, I have been slightly bemused by the whole process. Our kindergarten was involved in the 'trial', and I have a lot of unanswered questions. The new framework is based on a constructivist view of learning. That sits quite comfortably with my early childhood philosophy, but is it the best way?

- Who is being advantaged by our current beliefs about early childhood curriculum?
- Whose voice is being heard?
- Is it realistic or appropriate to have a seamless curriculum from birth to 18 years, and what issues does this raise for our organisation of learning?
- What of the childcare/preschool/school transition issues? Have these really been addressed by the new framework?
- Where were the opportunities for discussion between parents, carers, teachers, and children about what really impacts on teaching and learning?

Effective system-wide curriculum reform has to come from critically reflective 'curriculum artists' working at the coalface. There must be opportunity for professional networking, development, and debate. I, for one, will be keen to see how the Tasmanian situation progresses.

Anne Beinke
Director, Solomontown Kindergarten, SA

Protection and support FOR NESB FAMILIES

When enrolling new children from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB), child care professionals play a vital legal role, both for the service they represent and for parents of non-English speaking background.

The interaction and enrolment process between child care services and NESB parents can be afforded certain protection under the legal and equitable doctrines of 'informed consent' and 'undue influence'.

Informed consent

Generally speaking, the elements of free will and proper understanding of each party's rights and obligations must be involved when entering into a contract. Failure to involve such 'genuine', 'proper', or 'informed' consent may render the contract not binding.

The general principles underpinning 'informed consent' indicate that *the care professional who does not provide translated information or language support to a NESB client may be seen as taking advantage of the client's disadvantage*, thus seriously affecting the ability of the parent to judge what is in the best interests of their child.

When a parent signs an enrolment form without having accurately informed the service of the child's medical needs/background, any allergies, or custody orders pertaining to the child, etc., they have signed without informed consent. If a misunderstanding arises, this enrolment is not legally binding and the service would be seen as having taken advantage of the parent, and would have legally failed in its duty of care to this parent and child.

Current anecdotal information suggests that many care professionals are having difficulty in accessing language support through the telephone interpreter service (TIS) or bilingual inclusion workers. Consequently, rather than risk losing a potential NESB client who is kept waiting, many services are rushing the enrolment procedure using non-verbal communication.

However, when parents sign the legally binding enrolment forms without understanding the content, difficulties do arise. Writing to a service regarding specific health practices or medications to be administered can also be a very difficult task in an unfamiliar language, and misinterpretation of this information could be critical.

Undue influence

'Undue influence' occurs when one party takes unfair advantage of the weakness of the other party, to the degree that the weaker party could argue that he or she did not enter into the agreement voluntarily. The doctrine is applied where a special confidential relationship exists between the parties, e.g. where the parent trusts and depends on the impartial and fair advice offered by the service provider.

NESB families often do not understand the social services and systems available to them, and are therefore more highly dependent on the advice of professionals. As a result, the service provider is in a substantial position of influence. It is the service provider's role to inform prospective parents about all their options and different types of care available to them. If a service provider gives the parent only information that would benefit the provider's service, it could be seen as use of unfair tactics under the fair trading legislation, as well as undue influence under contract law.

If a misunderstanding arises when NESB parents have signed forms without understanding the documents, and the service provider has not explained the variety of options available, the provider has failed these parents in their duty of care.

Resource solutions

The Commonwealth Government has funded a national network of resource and training agencies and regional supplementary teams whose role is to provide inclusion support services for priority groups.

The supplementary teams link into casual bilingual inclusion services, source translated information, and/or TIS services to provide a variety of strategies to the child care industry. They aim to facilitate equitable access to services and to promote the building of positive professional relationships with Australian NESB families in all types of care.

The Statewide Training And Resourcing Program (STAR) is presently building a website to give service providers free access to online translated information. The website, www.starprogram.com.au is funded through a Queensland State Government access and equity grant. Additional relevant translated materials developed by counterpart organisations are continuously being added as links.

The online resources can be used as communication tools, to improve understanding between parents and carers, and will enable carers to document culturally appropriate child-rearing practices relevant to individual families.

Pola Nadas
Program Manager
Diversity in Child Care Qld, Inc.
Statewide Training and
Resourcing Program

Early childhood educators as play researchers

Many researchers suggest that children's play and individual initiative has given way to planned, structured procedures managed by adults. Children are often made to engage in controlled learning activities where content is often difficult for them to assimilate. In a study by Hjorth (1998) children expressed displeasure at the way adults related to their play and felt frustrated by adults' lack of knowledge about play scenarios.

As early childhood educators, it is easy to misread the messages and actions inherent in children's play, because we bring adult agendas to the play scenario. Cattanach (1998) warns against being constrained by our own social constructions of childhood, as this may lead us to devalue the creativity and subtlety of the narratives and stories children use in their play to make sense of their lives. So how can educators improve their understanding of children's play?

Sutton Smith (1994) questions why play, which is the major interest of young children, suffers from scientific neglect in early childhood research, and challenges early childhood educators to become play researchers.

Are you a play researcher—a participant-observer in children's play? This role 'entails a way of being present in every day settings that enhances your awareness and curiosity about the interactions taking place around you' (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p.54).

> *Danny is at the large sand tray and picks up the plastic toads. 'These can hop,' he says, and hops them around the sand. He fills an ice cream container with water and places the toads and some plastic fish in the container. 'These guys are playing in the pool.' He lifts them in and out of the water. 'Splash, jump, spalsh, jump, rebit, rebit, I'm giving them all a wash.' He takes the toads out of the water, places some lizards in the water, laughs, and says in an American accent, 'All the lizards are having their own bath'. Picking up the brown toad, he assumes a very deep voice and says, 'He's the boss'. He moves the toad up to the lion, saying, 'Lion, you get out of here, get out of here you lion'. He picks up five lizards and puts them in a line, saying, 'These guys have to save the toads from the baddies', and then rolls the toads in the sand. 'These guys like getting dirty.'*

Danny's projective play can be interpreted as a combination of manipulation, construction, gesture, and language. It offers a picture of his understanding about the connections he is making between his personal everyday experiences, and the experiences beyond his everyday world. He has taken on the role of narrator, and we gain insight into his developing sense of moral behaviour.

As a participant-observer, you hear children's narrative from a new perspective, you see the patterns of children's play behaviour, experience the known and the unknown, and develop a relationship of trust with children that allows you to be more than just an observer to their play. 'Participant observation provides the opportunity for acquiring the status of trusted person' (Glesne & Peskin, 1992, p.39).

Should you wish to be a play researcher, one way to experiment is by setting up a large sand tray for children. Provide time, space, and a range of materials and resources for projective play—wooden and plastic animals, people figures, bark, leaves, pebbles, pop sticks, small blocks—anything that enables the child to represent their world in symbolic form. Watch, listen, converse, photograph, and write. Become immersed in the symbolic world of the young child, and celebrate the narrative and your role as a play researcher.

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Combined rural services

In many rural communities the decline in population numbers has been accompanied by a similar decline and withdrawal of both government and private resources. This phenomenon—which will not be reversed in some communities—has resulted in a reassessment of the type and number of services the community can support, both from a financial and population perspective.

To address these issues, the concept of dual or joint multipurpose facilities that can service the divergent needs of the community has been developed.

These have taken the form of:

- a single facility servicing divergent but similar service needs, e.g. a long day care service; limited hours care service, playgroup, community kindergarten/preschool using the same premises at different times in order to preserve the integrity and identity of each service; or
- a single facility servicing different service types, e.g. a community kindergarten/preschool, and, for example, a respite service sharing the facility at different times.

What are the advantages?

Both models have advantages and disadvantages as follows.

Advantages

- Maintains the advantages that the respective service type offers, e.g. qualified teacher and consistent grouping of children in kindergarten/preschool with longer hours, and occasional attendance in limited hours care.
- The establishment of a single facility, with proper planning as to the needs of all groups accessing the building, is cost-effective. If there is also a sharing of resources, this can also be cost-effective.
- The community does not need to support—from a maintenance perspective—multiple facilities.
- The community's resources can be channelled and maximised to full advantage.
- The service can become a focal point for the whole community or a sectional interest, e.g. young children or specifically early childhood.
- Where similar service types, e.g. early childhood, are involved, there can be continuity for children moving from one type to another, depending on the child's and/or parental need.
- Satisfies the choice element as far as families' diverse needs are concerned.

Disadvantages

- Sharing space and facilities can be difficult unless good communication and guidelines are developed. These need to be mindful of timeframes, equipment storage, maintenance, responsibilities for administration, etc.
- Balancing the competing interests of each service provider and maintaining the distinction between service types can also be difficult. However, this may be essential to ensure that the communities' various preferences are acknowledged and respected. Crossover of service types may result in loss of identity for the service, for the parents and children served.
- Where dual services are under the same management, the various service types need to be represented to ensure that the identity of both are maintained, especially if separate funding or governmental agencies are involved.
- If a service wishes to expand, that option may be closed if a number of services are accessing the same facility. Demographics may alter and the facility may no longer meet some services' needs. Guidelines for usage would need to take account of this.

These innovative services work well when committees of management are well-informed; when good communication strategies are in place; when goodwill and cooperation are paramount; and when the services are well supported by their respective peak agencies. They cannot meet all the diverse needs of a community, but go a long way towards accommodating many of these needs while maintaining the valued characteristics of each service represented.

Examples of successful, innovative programs in rural regions

- Julia Creek Kindergarten and Child Minding Association in remote Queensland is a community kindergarten/preschool (three years to school age) three days per week, and a long day care centre (babies to school age) two days per week.
- Hughenden Kindergarten in North-West Queensland is a community kindergarten/preschool (three years to school age) two days per week, and a long day care centre (babies to school age) three days per week.
- Magnetic Island Kindergarten in North Queensland is a community kindergarten/preschool (three years to school age) for three half-days, and a limited hours care service for two full days and one half-day.
- Blackall Kindergarten in Central Queensland is a community kindergarten/preschool (three years to school age) two days per week, a limited hours care service for two half-days per week, and a playgroup one half-day per week.

Susan Whitaker
Director,
Community Early Childhood Services
Creche and Kindergarten Association of Queensland

Gina Pertile
Early Education Consultant
Creche and Kindergarten Association of Queensland

Helping children grieve

As a worker in a child care environment you may encounter the death of a parent of one of the children in your care. The challenge, therefore, is to provide some stability and support in what has become the child's chaotic world.

Literature available on children and grief states that children need honest and simple explanations about what has happened. They have fears and questions that need to be taken seriously. Children, however, have short attention spans and can deal with the pain only for short periods of time. One minute they can be asking questions about the death and feeling sad, then playing and laughing the next.

During a time of mourning a child's primary need is for inclusion and support. They need to feel loved, safe, and secure. They need ways to express and release their feelings of confusion, sadness, loss, abandonment, and anger. This can often be through play, since children do not possess the skills to express themselves verbally. Encouraging play, drawing, and talking will help the child to come to terms with the loss. An environment where the child feels safe to ask questions, openly communicate their feelings, and be given simple and honest answers is likely to help heal the pain of the loss. However, children may grieve again as they move into new developmental milestones and as they understand more.

How child care workers can help children grieve

- All children need to be told sensitively but honestly that death is an inescapable part of life and that the deceased is not going to return. Information should be pitched at the child's level and language skills.
- Children under six months old can sense something is wrong and that there is a change in the emotional atmosphere. It is important to provide for their physical needs and maintain a daily schedule. Non-verbal reassurances such as hugs and rocking are appropriate.
- Developmentally, preschoolers between three and five years do not understand cause and effect and may think they caused the death or that death is a punishment or contagious. This can lead them to blame themselves. Assure the child that the death was not his or her fault and that their parent did not want to leave them.
- Use concrete explanations, e.g. lifecycle of a butterfly/bug, and give clear answers. Death may be explained in terms of: the body stops working, the heart stops beating, no seeing, no feeling, etc.
- Attitudes and responses of people close to the child influence how a child grieves. Let the child express feelings as they arise, be it sadness, anger, or withdrawal. Don't rush them through their grief. Take your cues from them.
- Do not use cliches such as 'God took him to heaven', or euphemisms like 'he/she has gone on a long sleep'. If you use vague language like 'it was God's will', or 'she passed away', children get confused.
- Be aware of the cultural and religious beliefs of the child's family. Discuss with a significant adult any rituals, customs, and beliefs important to the family. Do not impose your own beliefs on the child.
- Provide a stable and nurturing environment. Children often wonder, 'Who will take care of me?' or 'Where will we live?'. By providing consistent, loving care for the child, you will help to alleviate fears of abandonment and separation.
- Encourage children to express their feelings through art or play. Provide outlets such as art, music, dress-ups, or a sandbox.

As hospital social workers, we actively encourage involving children in viewing their parent, arranging and attending the funeral, and memorial services. We encourage child care professionals to involve the child in an ongoing way, e.g. important dates such as birthdays, anniversaries, and mothers/fathers day. This creates memories and rituals that include both the child and the child care staff.

Aspasia Iosifidis

Social Worker-In-Charge, Wollongong Hospital

Clare Rogers

Deputy Social Worker-In-Charge, Wollongong Hospital

Further reading

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Attack of the *killer joules*

Mum, are you freg … freg …' Five-year-old Sally turns to same-age sibling for help. 'What's that word, Susie?'

'Pregnant,' says Susie decisively. The 'p' comes out like a small explosion.

She fixes a basilisk stare on my navel. 'Jodie's mum's got a big tummy like yours, and she's pregnant.' She mistakes my expression for one of incomprehension. 'That means she's expecting a baby,' she explains kindly.

I clutch at a towel. I shoo the twins out of the bathroom. That's the last time they're having a shower with me, I vow.

I also vow to ring Weightwatchers. And the gym.

Love of my life and sire of my children wants to know why this sudden attention to body image. I explain.

'Are you sure you're not pregnant?' he asks. I hit him over the head with my magazine. There's a terrific new diet in it.

Debbie-down-the-road pops in for a cuppa and a chat. She tucks into chocolate biscuits and fruit cake while I nibble at a rice cracker. 'You on a diet or something?' she asks.

Diet and something,' I say glumly. 'I'm going to Weightwatchers. And the gym.'

'You're crazy!' she declares. 'You're not overweight! What size are you?'

'Twelve,' I lie. Well, I must be lying. I was a 12 the last time I bought anything to wear. And that was nearly a year ago. Mums of twins can't afford clothes for themselves.

'There you are then!' Debbie is a cheerful size 18, going on 20. Or bigger.

I tell her what had brought on my attack of body awareness.

'Fancy taking notice of them!' she says scornfully, meaning the twins and LOML. 'You've got a bit of a tummy, true, but it's nothing compared to mine!'

I am resolved to grow fat, and look young till forty!

(Dryden, Secret Love, act III, sc I)

She lifts up the hem of her big girl's blouse. I see what she means. 'And I feel good about my body,' she adds.

'You do?' I fear my incredulity is showing.

She shrugs. 'Well, I do now. I used to diet like mad, and I was miserable as anything, because I really enjoy my food.' (So I'd noticed—there's only one chocolate biscuit left on the plate.) 'But then I read this article: "Big is Beautiful".' She takes a sip of her cafe latte, two sugars. 'There's a backlash, you know, against the promotion of the super-slim female body as the ideal. And a campaign to help women overcome poor body image. And not just in this country. The British Government even backed an Eating Disorders Summit on telly to discuss the epidemic of anorexia and bulimia among young women who think they're too fat.'

She helps herself to another slice of fruit cake. A bit of glacé cherry falls silently into the Grand Canyon of her cleavage.

'Blow it!' I say, snatching at the last chokky bikky. If Debbie can feel good about her body, so can I! I vow to stop punishing myself.

I don't tell LOML (or the twins) that I've stopped going to Weightwatchers and the gym. I try not to think about the money I paid up-front to these establishments.

Then my (taut-muscled, size 10) sister pays a visit.

'Guess what, Auntie Hilary!' Sally shrieks. 'Mum isn't fregnant.'

My sister, used to Sally's verbal idiosyncrasies, eyes my waistline. 'You could have fooled me,' she mutters.

Susie chimes in with her own sensational news item. 'And she's going to Weightlifters!'

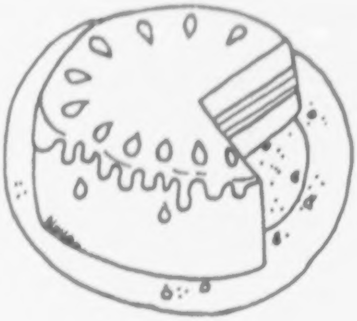
My sister raises a sardonic eyebrow. 'A bit late to train for the Olympics, isn't it?' She curls her lip. 'Still, it's a good idea to make an early start for the next lot. It'll take all of four years to get you into shape.'

The twins giggle disloyally as she pokes a finger into my stomach. It sinks in a fair way.

Should I tell her that Big is Beautiful? And that I've decided to feel good about my body?

Better not.

May Day



Critical teaching

Rethinking the way we work

Who is advantaged and who is disadvantaged by the way we currently work in early childhood education?

> *I always thought that there was some magic formula, that when you hit the spot with the right process for teaching and learning that it would just work … that there was one way and that when I got it I would 'see the light' and think, after so many years, 'I've finally got it'. I've come to realise that that's never going to happen—it's a bit sad, but it won't. I no longer believe that there is one method. For every child and every situation and every circumstance there are different methods … but that's a good thing because it means you're thinking about it and if you weren't being critically reflective then you'd never change, because you'd be stuck at one thing.*
> (Preschool Director, Critical Teaching Project)

The growing awareness of the ways in which gender, race, class, ethnicity, and ability can advantage or disadvantage children in the educative process, and the suggestion, 'if we always do what we always did, then we'll always get what we always got', challenges us to move beyond the belief that there can ever be just 'one right way' to construct, plan, implement, document, and evaluate curriculum.

Throughout 1999, a group of South Australian early childhood practitioners began examining the ways in which long-held beliefs and assumptions (many of which underpin the very foundations of early childhood practice) about how children learn, what children learn, and the best ways for children to learn, have advantages and disadvantages for particular children and groups of children. Through a process of critical reflection upon their own practices, recording of thoughts and changes in practice, and critical debate and discussion, they created new ways of thinking about and practising early childhood education. They became critical teachers.

The Critical Teaching Project these practitioners engaged in was led by Dr Glenda MacNaughton (University of Melbourne) and was an initiative of the Early Years Curriculum Unit, Department of Education, Training and Employment. Dr MacNaughton encouraged practitioners to begin their journey by reflecting upon questions such as:

- Who is the child?
- What goals are appropriate for the children we are working with?
- In whose interests are those goals developed? (E.g. child, teacher, family, state, industry.)
- How should the goals be accomplished?
- How should the goals be evaluated?

Consider one practitioner's reflections on these questions:

> *I have a thought … I don't know if I want to go there … but something happened that has been difficult for me not to think about … it's about friends … I have always cringed when a teacher says 'We're all friends here'. I have even cringed when I heard myself saying it. I know and do not expect every child to 'be friends'. I expect them all to have a friend and respect the other children. I think we devalue friends by saying we can all be friends.*
>
> *A child said to Lee: 'Are you brown or white?' Reply: 'I have brown skin.' 'Then you can't come to my party … Nanny said we can't have brown people.'*
>
> *How does this fit in with the five critical questions? Is teaching about helping children to have friends?*
> (Kindergarten Teacher, Critical Teaching Project)

For early childhood practitioners whose goals include equity and social justice, any real endeavours towards a more equitable society may well require us to rethink the way we currently work. If our early childhood programs are to meet the needs of all children, practitioners must become reflective, critical teachers and call into question the practices we've taken for granted and come to think of as 'normal'.

Kerryn Jones
Critical Teaching Project Report, 2000
Department of Education Training and Employment, SA

Lis Garic

The early years of school: Not just babysitting

Early childhood trained primary teacher, Lis Garic, is passionate about a lot of areas in early childhood: language in young children; the creative domain of young children; and, particularly, the health and physical development of children.

This latter area of interest reflects Lis's previous role as a physical education specialist teacher, when she helped develop a package on fundamental movement skills; 'Basic skills,' Lis says, 'that children don't have anymore because they are not active enough; things we take for granted that children can do naturally, such as skip, hop, and climb.'

> *'Early childhood teachers are still not respected ... we are seen as baby-sitters'*

That role took up four of Lis's teaching years, but for two years now she has taught a composite preschool/Year 1 class at Forest Crescent Primary School at Thornlie in Perth, WA. The class is currently made up of 11 pre-primary and 13 Year 1 children—a mix of 24 five- and six-year-olds.

A graduate of Curtin University, Perth, Lis was conferred the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Education: Early Childhood Education, and worked as the aforementioned physical education teacher, as a librarian, and as a teacher of Years 1 and 2 before taking up her current position.

Forest Crescent School 'has a very big focus on early childhood,' says Lis, 'and includes an intervention program that looks at four- and five-year-olds to see if they have difficulties in their oral language.' Initially the program involved the pre-primary staff at Forest Crescent Primary School. More recently, the program involves speech and learning and education students from Curtin University working over a 10-week period with children who have problems with their speech. (The program, Time for Talk, featured in a previous profile in the Autumn 1999 issue of *Every Child* magazine.)

The program was initiated some eight years ago by principal Jean Rice when it was realised that there were big gaps in children's oral language skills, according to Lis. 'And what it really gave us was good baseline data which backed up what we've always believed about children's oral language difficulties and what we've been doing in early childhood; that is, rather than waiting until children are eight or nine years old to address any difficulties, we're doing it at five or six.'

The important thing about early childhood teacher training, Lis says, is that it allows for the provision of programs appropriate for students to develop at their own level; that programs are based on the developmental approach—dealing with the development of the child as a whole from three to eight years of age—rather than the content-driven approach, which is age-driven. The developmental approach allows for hands-on open-ended tasks, which allow children to build on what they already know, and for teachers to intervene as early as possible if there is a problem.

And the curriculum framework complements this philosophy of early childhood teaching, 'by opening-up barriers when children are working in a particular area,' Lis says.

'If children aren't progressing in a particular area, then [the framework prompts us to ask] why? It makes us accountable and can back us up as we go along. It ... allows for more flexibility. Content-driven programs do not allow for flexibility and children are moved along without necessarily understanding what they are doing. The framework highlights that the way we've been teaching—developmental learning—is the right way.'

However, Lis emphasises, 'teachers do not necessarily have to be early childhood trained to share this philosophy. Many other teachers believe in this approach too.'

But she does agree that many schools continue not to recognise the importance of the early years. 'There is still a very big gap ... we have to constantly push and sell the benefits of teaching to the early years … [and] early childhood teachers are still not respected … we are still seen as baby-sitters.'

> *'[The] data backed up what we've always believed about children's difficulties'*

Lis can't see herself leaving early childhood teaching in the near future. 'As a teacher I find it very rewarding,' she says. 'And I want to see how much further I can take these children. In WA most teachers have a group of children for only a year; I have the same group of children for two years and I have found the continuity with the children, and also their parents, very important [for the children's development].

'Parents have been amazed at what their children can achieve. We run oral language activity groups made up of children at different ability levels, that target specific difficulties. Parents come in each week over a block period [usually six weeks] and help with activities … and if we didn't have this support from parents, we couldn't do it.'

Louise Tigchelaar

The latest title from AECA

Home is Where the Family is Moving House with Children

By Pam Linke

Children often lack the skills needed to cope with major changes, such as moving house. This is because they do not have the experience of previous changes to remember and build on. In this new book, published by AECA in collaboration with the Australian Defence Force, Pam Linke discusses how parents and carers can make children's transitions to new homes and schools easier. It includes useful suggestions on how to make moving house an adventure, and is an essential guide for helping children manage change.
RRP $14.96 (inc. GST and p&h)

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REVIEWS

Child-Free Zone

Susan and David Moore
Sydney: Chequered Gecko (2000)
ISBN 0 646 39494 0 RRP $17.95

How does one begin to review a book called *Child-Free Zone* in a publication dedicated to being a voice for young children? With a great deal of regret, that's how, because the tone emanating from this self-published book is that children are dislikeable creatures.

The authors, Sydney couple Susan and David Moore, leave the reader in no doubt. Susan Moore says she has never spent time with children and, as a result, doesn't feel comfortable around them '... I don't enjoy their company'. David Moore, a martial arts devotee, is more vehement:

'As I grew up and started working I came to realise that money was hard to come by and that you needed a damn lot of it to get by in life. It wasn't long before a couple of bad relationships with greedy women made me realise that I wasn't going to pay for anybody's free ride on this planet and this included any children that I may have had with them.

'After a while I grew to generally dislike children. It seemed like every one of them I encountered was obnoxious, naughty, whiney (sic), precocious, noisy, lying, manipulating, annoying, disobedient and misbehaved ... They are just undisciplined and the law won't let parents discipline them any more.'

Some of the 80 or so people interviewed by the authors agree. Monica, 30 (no surname) says: 'I don't like children ... they have no endearing characteristics and are best avoided or ignored.'

Of course, not everyone who makes the decision to remain childless dislikes kids. Some are haunted by unhappy childhoods, others have environmental concerns, many put their emotional energy into community work or caring for elderly parents.

The book (which has a website from which you can purchase 'child-free zone' stickers and coffee mugs) purports to be a free and frank look at a 'taboo' subject. I think it's a sad attempt to vilify a group of human beings who are too young to speak up for themselves.

Sally Loane
Journalist and Broadcaster,
702 ABC Sydney
Author of Who Cares? Guilt, Hope and the Child Care Debate

Games Children Play: The Effects of Media Violence on Young Children

Mimi Wellisch
Canberra: AECA (2000)
ISBN 1 87589 045 9 RRP $10.98

This Research in Practice Series booklet—the second of four titles this year—provides readers with information on the effects of the media on young children. The author has provided a range of supporting citations and case examples to illustrate how pervasive violence has become and how harmful it can be to young children.

Wellisch provides practical examples to readers on how to recognise the effects of TV, video, and computer violence on young children. A startling and all too familiar range of examples is provided. She also provides a guide to staff on what they can do when a particular child exhibits aggressive behaviour on a regular basis.

Finally, Wellisch provides a series of case studies and solutions to help staff deal with children who have experienced a significant amount of violence through the media. While this booklet makes depressing reading, it does provide sufficient advice on how practitioners can act to make a difference to individual children who become the victims of violence.

This booklet would be a valuable resource for schools and centres. It will help staff to work more effectively with parents who may not realise the harm of media violence on children.

Dr Marilyn Fleer
Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Education
University of Canberra

Hand in Hand: An Early Literacy and Numeracy Information Package for Parents

Queensland School Curriculum Council (1997)
ISBN 0 7242 7764 1 RRP $38.50

This pack, consisting of a video and ideas cards, is designed to stimulate thinking around the real-life, everyday opportunities for literacy learning. The video engages the viewers' interest as it presents snapshots of adults and children interacting in everyday situations. It attempts to present a range of cultures and experiences but, in my view, does not extend this far enough.

The focus of the package is on the written code of literacy learning, although it is stated in the video that literacy involves more than reading and writing.

At times the video presents a somewhat contrived picture of literacy learning with regard to children's literacy development through play, music, oral storytelling, and rhyming play. One of the keys to literacy seems to lie in the early development of oral and aural discrimination in oracy. This is often part of the child's own development, using representation, interest and the beginning of metacognition. A little more attention to these aspects would have made the pack more worthwhile.

Both the video and the cards would be useful for families. However, the experiences present limited opportunities for families from a range of very different cultures, and use examples of rather exclusive experiences, such as 'reading a menu'.

The pack would be a useful component for raising awareness about ways to engage children with the written code. However, I would want to see it as one component in starting dialogue around the broader concept of literacy learning, with a greater emphasis on play, and I would also include discussion around multiple literacies.

Susan Krieg
Research Associate
University of South Australia

Read Me a Story: Parents, Teachers and Children as Partners in Literacy Learning (Revised edn)

Julie Spreadbury

Sydney: Choice Books

First published 1994 by the Australian Reading Association

ISBN 0 947 277 54 4 RRP $14.30

While this book announces that it is 'for teachers, parents and parents-to-be' (p.vii), its primary audience is likely to be parents.

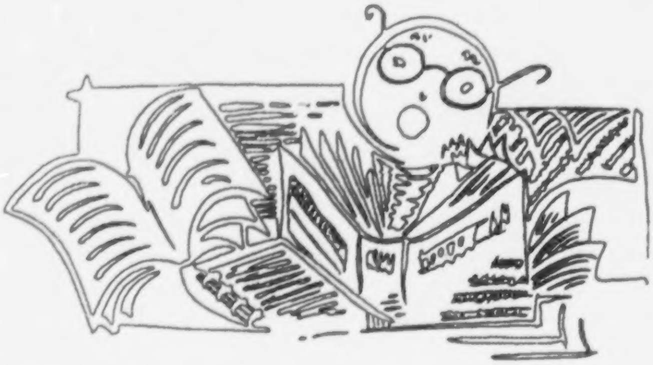
The author is an early childhood teacher, tertiary educator, and mother. She uses the example of her son Scott to illustrate how parents 'teach' their children to read from their very first conversational interactions with them. She describes a family where reading is important to its adult members; and where a child may effortlessly absorb this model of reading as an enjoyable part of everyday life as the first important step towards the achievement of literacy.

The book has four main sections: the journey into literacy; research into family literacy; advice for parents; and advice for teachers. The language used is mostly free of jargon—while the rather technical concept of 'scaffolding' is introduced, it is explained and illustrated in some detail. Spreadbury also looks at ways teachers can 'build bridges' between home and school by sharing ideas about fostering their children's literacy with parents.

Suggestions are practical and mostly inexpensive in terms of money, although requiring some extra time and effort by parents. The finding quoted in the research chapter that '… parents … are highly competent at facilitating their children's literacy learning during parent-child reading aloud sessions in the home' (p.27) may motivate parents to implement some of Spreadbury's ideas.

This little book could be a useful gift for young parents-to-be who have not studied child development or the teaching of literacy, but want to do the right thing by their new baby. It is available from the Australian Consumers Association.

Leone Huntsman
Former Senior Lecturer, Child Development,
Macquarie University



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News & Views

Funding for kindergartens

About 60,000 Victorian preschoolers will benefit from a $65-per-child boost in funding to kindergartens over the next 12 months. The payment, according to the Minister of Community Services, fulfils the Government's election promise to increase support for all parents with children attending kindergarten, and aims to encourage a higher attendance of four-year-olds at preschool. The Minister's expectation is that these funds will be used to keep fees down. More information about the funding can be found at the Department of Community Services website, www.dhs.vic.gov.au

ParentLink

The ACT Government has launched ParentLink, a new parenting assistance program. The program includes an extended-hours telephone service, which is sponsored by NRMA, and the ParentLink website. The program is designed to increase parenting confidence skills by providing guidance, support, and referral information. The website contains a community resource directory and other practical information. A new series of parent guides are also being written as part of this program, which will be rolled out over the next two years.

Teaching standards

There is a growing feeling among teachers and other educators that standards need to be further developed by the teaching profession. The Australian Science Teacher's Association and the Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers, in collaboration with the Australian Literacy Educators Association, are already working on the development of advanced professional standards and performance assessments for highly accomplished teachers. The Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA) is currently writing a discussion paper on professional teaching standards within the Australian context. AECA is also doing work in this area.

It is crucial that those working with young children understand how to access the wealth of information available on the Internet

Indigenous education

Indigenous education is well and truly on the national agenda. Increasingly it is being seen as a mainstream issue in education. The recent march across Sydney Harbour Bridge clearly demonstrated the community's strong support for the process of reconciliation. Education and schools will be a part of that process. The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation says:

> *Reconciliation between Aboriginal indigenous peoples and all other Australians is about building bridges. It is about respecting our differences. It is about giving everybody a fair go. It is about building on the strengths of common ground. We believe that reconciliation will be achieved when Australians, in all our diversity, commit to a living reality in our communities, workplaces, and organisations.*

The council also believes that principals, teachers, and school support staff across the nation should be fully trained in cross-cultural awareness, to ensure that mainstream programs are responsive to the needs of indigenous students.

Useful websites

www.childforum.com is a new site designed to help bridge the gaps between practice, research, and policy. It is an independent New Zealand site and provides a forum for the exploration of issues and research into the wellbeing and education of children from birth to school-leaving age. The site includes information about children, families, educators, and society; research articles; news summaries; and questions and answers.

www.ctw.org/passport is also worth a look. This site aims to help children explore their similarities and differences.

Indigenous education is well and truly on the national agenda

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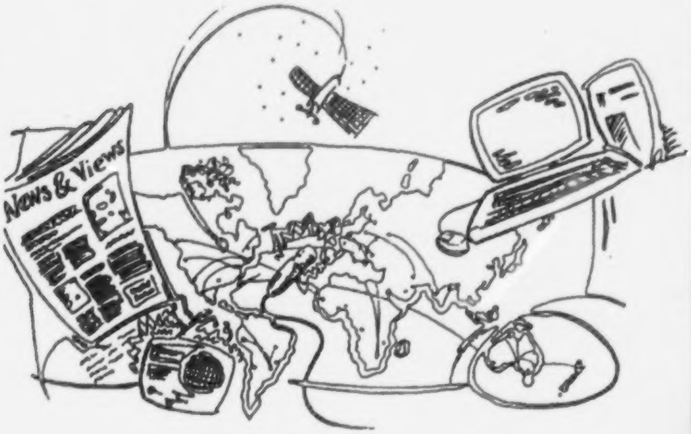
So much is being written about the Internet that it is hard to keep up. New relationships are forming between individuals who would otherwise never have known each other, let alone communicated. Cyberspace has given us many opportunities to teach and learn, to share information, and exchange ideas. It is crucial that those working with and for young children understand how to access the wealth of information available on the Internet to support their work. AECA's upcoming publication, *Children's Services On-line*, aims to help this happen.



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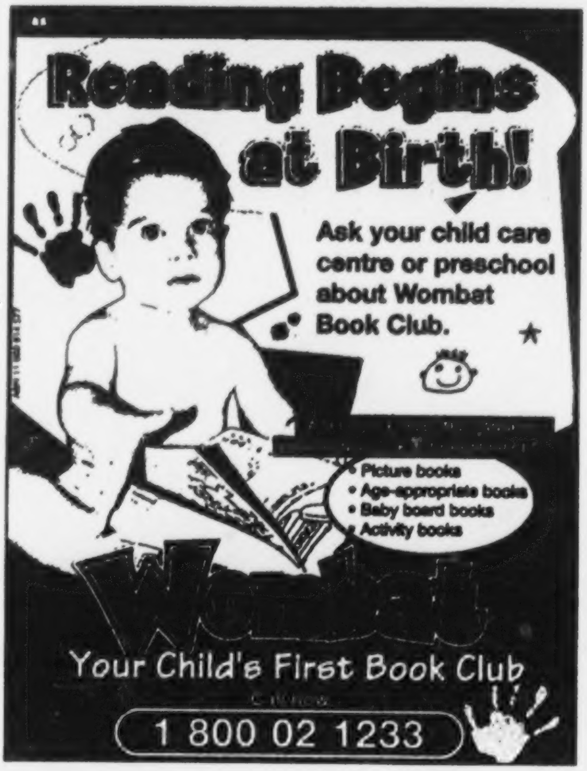

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AECA Viewpoint

The year in review

This is an overview of the National Director's report to the AECA Annual Council meeting, held in Canberra, July 2000. It is a comment on some of the key areas of work undertaken over the past 12 months. It also discusses some of the thinking that has underpinned that work, focusing on areas identified by AECA as being of strategic importance.

Membership

The move to nationally administered membership (NAM) was one of AECA's key goals for 1999–2000. It has been achieved and from all accounts is operating smoothly. Having a designated membership officer in the national office has allowed a focus on membership that would otherwise have been impossible. It has enabled us to elicit information from members and potential members that will assist with future membership development and maintenance strategies.

Much thought has gone into the implications that might arise if our work was reshaped according to some new and interesting thinking by management and marketing experts. New approaches to management and marketing suggest that customers/members need to be identified and differentiated in terms of their needs and their value to the company/organisation. Each customer/member should be treated differently, based on their particular needs. The insights gained should enable AECA to better meet members' requirements, thereby building a loyal membership base.

Obviously, no thinking of this kind is complete, but it is informative—indeed, potentially transformative—in terms of the way we do things.

Emphasis moves from product creation to meeting client/member needs, which opens up the prospect of new operational methods. One simple example relates to telephone on-hold messages. Nationally, consideration has been given to putting one of these on AECA's telephone. Our first thoughts were that the on-hold message should contain information about AECA. Perhaps we should think about this from the perspective of the people calling us, and what they might find useful?

The insights gained should enable AECA to better meet members' requirements

Vulnerable children

Council 1999 agreed that in the coming year AECA should give priority to issues relating to vulnerable children and their families. Following is a report of what has been done nationally this year.

A paper based on the Council 99 discussion about vulnerable children was written. It was published in *Every Child* and provided to the Commonwealth Child Care Advisory Council (CCCAC). It was also circulated to branches, the National Children's Services Forum (NCSF), and the Australian Council of Social Services.

Another important contribution in this area was AECA's submission to the Government's discussion paper on welfare reform. The Government's paper emphasised the importance of independence and self-reliance in an economic sense. It viewed dependency as a problematic social malaise, rather than as an integral part of the social order. It failed to take account of the way in which interdependence and dependence sustain and structure human interaction; and that independence cannot exist in isolation from interdependent relationships. This fact is not new to people who work with young children.

An effective approach to welfare reform must be set within a framework which supports these relationships, and recognises that the welfare system is not only about a nation's vulnerable citizens, but also about the production of an integrated and cohesive society. Within this framework, the welfare system could reward all citizens.

From this perspective, AECA's submission drew attention to early intervention as a way to build self-reliance and independence in each new generation. Research clearly demonstrates that early intervention initiatives which enhance family support and children's experiences in the first three years of life can dramatically affect long-term outcomes and are extremely cost-effective. AECA also argued that welfare reform could not be seen in isolation from other areas of government intervention such as education, child care, and health.

AECA presented this submission to the principal private secretary to the Minister for Family and Community Services. The material in the submission was included in AECA's responses to Australia's second national action plan on its human rights obligations and in Australia's contribution to the Copenhagen Declaration. Parts of AECA's submission were also included in the Government's final report on welfare reform.

The submission was circulated to peak organisations, including members of NCSF. The NCSF asked that a letter based on this submission be written to the Minister for Family and Community Services. A summary of the submission was printed in *Every Child* and the National Director discussed the submission in an address to the NSW North Coast Regional Group.

Work in the priority area of vulnerable children also progressed through membership of the National Investment for the Early Years (NIFTeY) steering committee. There is no doubt that the interests of NIFTeY and AECA dovetail. It is wonderful to have another organisation with related interests, advocating for young children and their families. AECA needs to identify how best to maximise its contribution to NIFTeY's work.

The DETYA-funded *Building Bridges: Literacy Development for Indigenous Young Children* also furthers this priority. This project aims to find out what Aboriginal parents believe is important about the skills and knowledge their children have, and why this is important. A limited number of families were given digital cameras for a week, so they could record this information. This information will be used to ask the question, 'What does this mean for the way teachers and schools work with these children?'.

The next stage of the project is a meeting to record the cultural meaning of the film material, and to discover what the parents would like teachers to know about them and their children, and why. This discussion will be filmed and used as a resource at the working conference, and will be included in the documentary being made as part of this project. This is a unique approach, which promises rich rewards.

The parents' commentaries on the videos are very informative, the workshop just completed was an exceptional experience, and the book being written will undoubtedly be a fascinating and essential resource for those working with young children.

AECA would not have been able to enter this area of work so easily without the DETYA project funding, and it has become a clear priority for our organisation.

> *Supporting services in this way contributes directly to the provision of quality care for children*

One of the key people involved in this project was Jo Pender. Jo was an indigenous early childhood teacher, and a member of the NSW AECA Executive. Tragically, she passed away earlier his year, and will be greatly missed.

AECA: The national umbrella organisation

One of the key priorities for AECA is to maintain and enhance AECA's status as the national umbrella organisation.

AECA's ongoing work at branch level, on national committees, and through the NCSF provides a sound basis to argue the efficacy of this designation. Without that work it would not deserve this position. However, these things alone are not always sufficient to guarantee acceptance of this position by government and other organisations.

There is no doubt that AECA's standing with government, peak organisations, and early childhood services has been enhanced in the past 12 months as a result of its work on two very large projects: the GST Business Skills Education project and the Computer/Internet project.

These two projects have given AECA exposure to every children's service across the country (14,500 in total) on eight occasions in the past six months, and the 16,000 family day care carers on at least three occasions. All services have been made aware of AECA's purpose and membership.

AECA provided direct and practical support to help services cope with the introduction of the GST. Supporting services in this way contributes directly to the provision of quality care for children. The calibre of the assistance provided has enhanced AECA's standing with services across the country and the sector-specific peak organisations.

The Computer/Internet project has positioned AECA as an innovator and leader, bringing services to the forefront of the information economy. As a direct result of this project, AECA has received funding to produce an easy-to-read guide, *Early Children's Services On-line*. This book will allow early childhood educators and carers to reap the potential of the Internet in their professional and business practice.

Funding has also been made available for a project officer to work on the development of the computer project. This person will be responsible for establishing the best practice models for use of the Internet in professional and business practice, and will also work on the early childhood sector of the EdNA website. AECA contributed to this website as part of another project some years ago. It is important for the early childhood community that this site is well maintained.

This year, AECA entered into a number of strategic partnerships. One of these involved collaboration with the Department of Defence on AECA's latest title, *Home is Where the Family is*, about moving house with young children. The book is designed to be a practical guide to helping young children cope with the change and stress associated with moving house.

ABS report—*Current social trends*

ABS survey of community services organisations

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) is conducting a national community services industry survey for the 1999–2000 financial year. The survey forms have been sent to nursing homes, accommodation for the aged, other residential care services (including crisis accommodation), child care services, community services peak bodies and advocacy groups, organisations involved in supported and/or open employment schemes, other non-residential care service (including welfare groups), local government authorities, and other relevant government bodies.

> *The annual snapshot … presents a complex and revealing picture of the way we are*

The survey will collect data about employment (including volunteers), income and expenses (including sources and applications of funds), and service provision information. As with all ABS surveys, the information provided will remain strictly confidential to the ABS and will only be released in aggregate form.

It is expected that output from the 1999–00 survey will be available from around June 2001.

Latest social trends in Australia

The annual snapshot of Australian society, released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), presents a complex and revealing picture of the way we are and trends for on-going social change into the 21st century.

1995–96 Survey results

The survey was last conducted by the ABS for the 1995–96 financial year, and the following benchmark data was obtained:

	Type of organisation			
Item	For profit	Not for profit	Government	Total
Businesses/organisations providing community services at end June 1996 (no.)	2,115	5,403	540	8,058
Employees at end June 1996				
Direct community services provision employees (no.)	56,445	115,400	52,058	223,903
Other (no.)	14,020	67,112	16,023	97,156
Total (no.)	70,465	182,512	68,082	321,059
Volunteers for the month of June 1996 (no.)	3,926	213,446	22,018	239,390
Expenditure on community services activities				
Community services activities				
Personal and social support ($m)	25.7	695.0	846.5	1,567.2
Child care ($m)	371.3	414.1	240.3	1,025.7
Training and employment ($m)	0.2	375.1	0.2	375.5
Financial and material assistance ($m)	..	108.7	44.4	153.2
Residential care and accommodation support ($m)	1,402.8	2,586.3	1,015.5	5,004.6
Statutory protection and placement ($m)	..	12.7	185.2	197.9
Corrective services ($m)	..	6.7	151.0	157.7
Other direct community service activities ($m)	13.4	15.0	5.1	33.5
Total ($m)	1,813.5	4,213.4	2,488.3	8,515.2
Community service related activities ($m)	51.8	910.7	258.3	1,220.8
Total ($m)	**1,865.3**	**5,124.1**	**2,746.6**	**9,736.0**

Australian Social Trends 2000 reports that:

- Most people living in areas of low socio-economic status live in major urban centres, but such groups tend to be over-represented in smaller towns and geographically isolated locations.
- The decline in trade union membership has accelerated: in 1999, 26% of employees were trade union members, compared to 40% in 1992.
- Employment arrangements continue to change: in 1998, 27% of employees were in casual work, up from 19% in 1988. New work arrangements, which are generally less secure, have been evolving.
- Long-term unemployment has become less a youth issue and more

a mature person's issue: in 1999, the majority (58%) of long-term unemployed were aged 35 and over (up from 46% in 1989).

- The earnings gap has widened: the difference in earnings between low and high income earners in full-time jobs has been increasing, with those at the very top moving ahead at a much faster rate.
- Women's hourly earnings fell as a proportion of men's hourly earnings between 1994 and 1998.
- Indigenous people are a disadvantaged group compared to the general population on a range of indicators; including health, education, and employment.
- Tertiary students are an older and more qualified group—the boom in tertiary education has also seen other changes in the profile of students. There are more females studying, and more part-time students.
- Marrriages have become more culturally diverse: in 1998, over half (52%) of all marriages were between people from different birthplace groups (compared to 39% in 1974).
- More people under 55 live without a partner: in the 35–44 age group, 23% were without a partner in 1996, compared to 17% in 1986.
- More young adults aged in their twenties are staying at home with their parents. Between 1986 and 1999 the proportion increased from 27% to 31%.
- Smoking is less common: by the mid-1990s, only 24% of the population were smokers, compared to 37% in 1977.
- Suicide death rates among men have been climbing over recent decades. The years of potential life lost from suicide, compared to those lost from other deaths, has been rising.
- Fewer people live in caravan parks: censuses show that in 1996 there were 32% fewer caravan park residents than in 1991. Residents tended to be older, with lower incomes, and were less likely to be in the labour force than the general population.

The above information is collated from *Australian Social Trends*, available from ABS bookshops, RRP $42.

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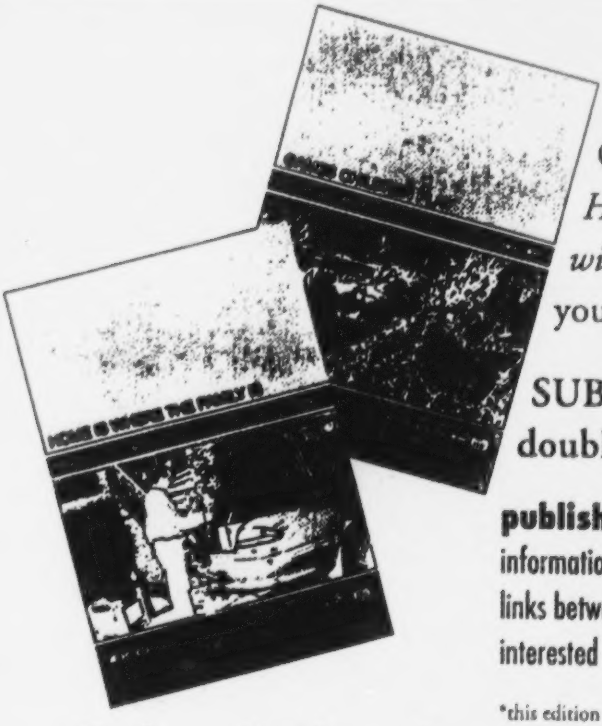

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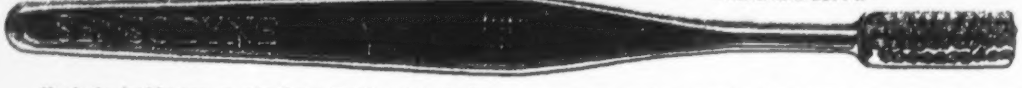

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Stop the effects of media violence

Most children living in Australia today have access to a television, video games, and computers, and are influenced by what they see.

Many children's TV programs are of a very high standard. Research has shown that children who view altruistic behaviour on television tend to become more helpful and cooperative. Similarly, many computer games are intellectually challenging and can enhance learning.

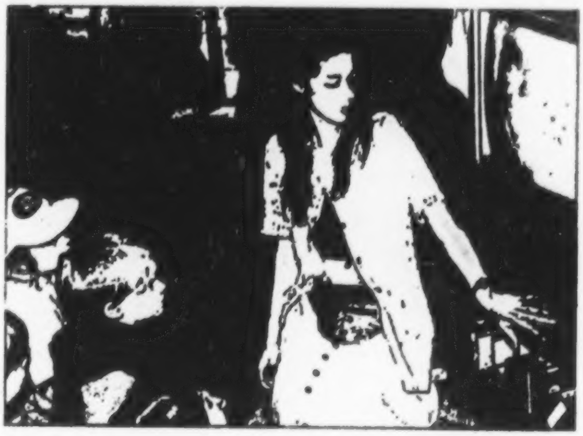
Recognising violence in the media

However, there are other programs for children that entertain through excitement and suspense. Many of these programs contain violence.

Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between what is violence and what is just plain fun. So, when should we become concerned about the type of violence shown in a program or in games?

We should be concerned when we see:

- depictions of injurious physical violence to another person;
- depictions of psychological violence;
- heroes who kill 'baddies';
- the use of menacing, threatening, or intimidating language;
- the use of weapons and special effects for the purpose of injury and destruction;
- any show that also runs commercials of toy merchandise featuring an abundance of muscles and/or weapons; and
- interactive games which involve killing and being killed.



Long-term effects of watching TV violence

- By the time a child has finished primary school, he or she will have watched at least 8000 murders and 100 000 other acts of violence.
- Aggressive children prefer to watch more and more violent TV and video games. Such children are often unpopular, so they watch more TV, getting reinforcement for their actions through the shows they watch, rather than through their social interactions.
- Children who are aggressive during primary school continue to be aggressive during adolescence and young adulthood.
- Most children who exhibit aggression are boys. This trend has been observed globally, regardless of culture or race.

Why children play

One function of play is to practise adult roles, either imitating adult behaviour or playing at being an adult. So, not only do children romp around, playing fun games such as chasing, they also dress up and pretend to cook, log trees, go fishing, etc.

However, since the advent of TV and computer games, new and disturbing elements of play are emerging.

How violent TV and games affect play behaviour:

- Children identify with the heroes.
- Some children play 'goodies ' and chase others, who are 'baddies'.
- Children copy the violence they have watched.
- Children use intimidating, menacing language, such as 'I have a gun and I'm going to kill you!'

Early Intervention

If your child exhibits frequent aggressive behaviour and speech and is fascinated by killing and war-type games, it is important to:

- have your child checked by a paediatrician to ensure that he or she is medically sound;
- put away all war-like toys and discourage all 'killing' games;
- cut out all violent TV viewing, videos, and video/computer games;
- spend extra time with your child pursuing non-violent activities;
- seek professional counselling if there is no change after a reasonable period;
- contact your local Early Intervention Clinic for advice if your child continues to act out violent behaviour.

Alternative tools to being powerful

With our society's strong pro-violence diet in the media, we need to consistently intervene in potentially violent games if we are to have any counter-influence. We have to let our children know that violent games are unacceptable and anti-social. There is nothing romantic about children becoming frightened and hurt.

Teach your child that he/she can be powerful by:

- saying sorry;
- taking turns with others to wear a special *nice friend badge*. The wearer of the badge helps others who are hurt or sad;
- using conflict resolution to solve problems;
- becoming assertive rather than aggressive;
- communicating rather than hitting;
- sharing; and
- inviting others to a game and asking to join in a game.

Source: *Games Children Play: The Effects of Media Violence on Young Children*, by Mimi Wellisch. Canberra: AECA (2000). ISBN 1 87589 045 9. $12.53 (inc.p&h & GST).

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Accolades

Macquarie University Graduation Ceremony

Congratulations to the following students who were awarded Master of Early Childhood degrees at the Macquarie University's Institute of Early Childhood graduation ceremony:

- Tracey Simpson
- Leigh Russ
- Jennifer Roberts-Mendoza
- Elizabeth Lewis
- Loraine Fordham

The ceremony was held in April this year, and the awards were presented by the Head of the Division, Professor Alan J. Hayes, BA NSW, PhD, FAPsS.

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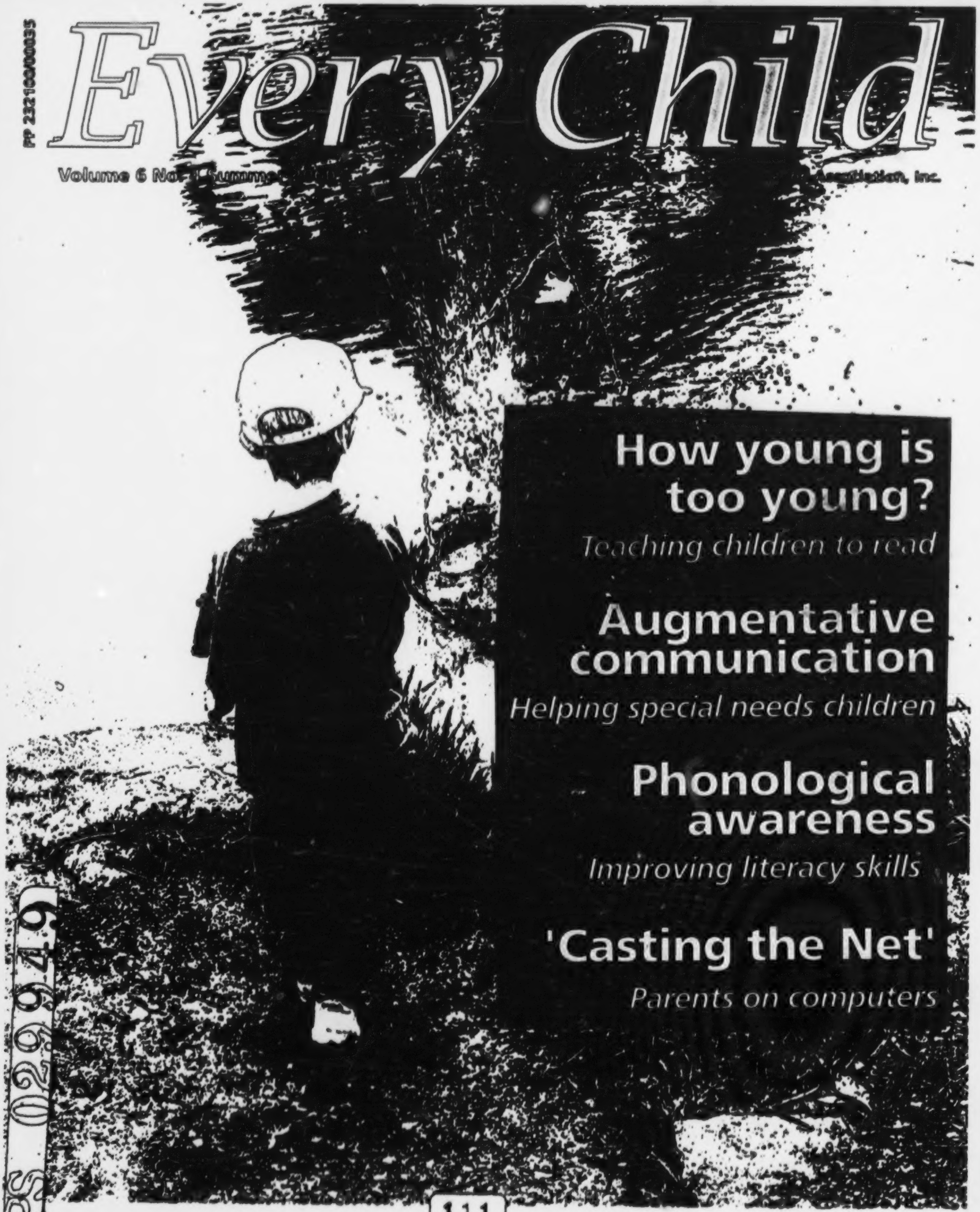

How young is too young?

Teaching children to read

Augmentative communication

Helping special needs children

Phonological awareness

Improving literacy skills

'Casting the Net'

Parents on computers

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An Australian magazine focusing on the needs of children from 0–8 years

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AECA Disclaimer
The opinions expressed in this magazine are those of the authors and not necessarily those of AECA. By publishing a diversity of opinion, we hope to provide a forum which promotes professional growth, creativity and debate in the early childhood field.

Editorial Policy
The material published in the magazine will aim to be inclusive of children in Australia wherever they live, regardless of race, gender, class, culture, or disability.

The magazine will not publish material which runs counter to the wellbeing and equality of all children and their families, and those who work with them.

About AECA
The Australian Early Childhood Association Inc. (AECA) is Australia's leading specialist publisher of early childhood literature. It is a national peak non government organisation acting in the interests of young children aged 0-8, and for older children in outside school hours care. It actively promotes the provision of high quality services for all young children and their families and supports the important role of parents in caring for their children. AECA is also the national umbrella organisation for Children's Services and sees this task as supporting the advocacy role of the child care sector as a whole, without undermining the rights of each specialist organisation to operate and speak independently.

Australian Early Childhood Association, Inc.
***Every Child* Volume 6 No. 4 Summer 2000**

Should we teach young children to read?

Developmental research findings indicate that language learning peaks in children between the ages of 18 months and four years. So why do we not teach children to read until they are five or six? In this article, Mimi Wellisch looks at the three main reasons why, she believes, so many children have problems learning to read. She argues that children learn readily at a younger age, and that teaching them when they are most receptive could avert problems with learning to read in later years.

Page 4

Assisting special needs children

Many special needs children experience frustration when they are unable to communicate effectively with others. Augmentative communication techniques, which can be easily implemented and integrated into the daily routine, can help provide a channel of understanding between these children and their peers and teachers. In this article, Lynette Duffy discusses how implementing augmentative communication techniques can help children with special needs choose activities and toys, follow routines, remember behavioural codes, and above all, be understood by others.

Page 6

It's time for phonological fun

Many recent studies have established that phonological awareness is vital if children are to become effective readers and writers. Phonological skills lead to an understanding of the sounds and syllables of words, which provides a good base for literacy learning. In this issue of *Every Child*, Susan Galletly explains how teaching children phonological skills in the preschool years can help avoid problems in literacy learning later on, and presents ideas for teaching children these skills in a fun, engaging way.

Page 8

'Casting the Net' to new parents

In order to create an effective learning environment at home, parents need to understand what their children are learning at school. A primary school in Victoria has recognised this fact, and, in light of the prominent role technology is taking in our lives, has introduced a computer and Internet program for parents. Gabrielle Leigh explains how this innovative program has brought new skills to parents, allowed a home-learning environment for children, and established an effective link between the school and the community.

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Judy Radich— AECA'S new President

Thinking about what I might say to readers of *Every Child* as the newly elected president of the Australian Early Childhood Association Inc. (AECA), I can't help but reflect on past presidents of AECA. Since I became an active member I have witnessed Anne Stonehouse, Tonia Godhard, and Susan Whitaker lead AECA—all respected early childhood professionals.

I come to the presidency as the parent of four teenagers and the director of a community-based long day care centre in northern New South Wales. I completed my initial early childhood teacher training in New Zealand and taught for a number of years in New Zealand kindergartens for three- to five-year-olds. I spent a period on the executive of the New Zealand Kindergarten Teachers' Association where we worked to raise the profile of early childhood teaching and to highlight the correlation between properly trained and resourced early childhood professionals and positive outcomes for children.

After maternity leave in 1979 I returned to work, leaving my son in informal care with a former colleague four days and with my parents one day per week. The current debates around informal care and the notion of 'matching mothers' reflect my experience all those years ago. An experience that was, in general, a positive one for our family.

I left work again and went on to have three more children between 1981 and 1988. I retained my involvement with young children as the president of a local kindergarten committee, where I helped raise $100,000 to match the Government's offer to build a kindergarten in our small town.

In 1988, I returned to work as a group leader with the two-year-olds in a commercial long day care centre. Being able to take my two younger children to work with me eased the transition and isolation I felt after moving away from family and friends. In 18 months in this position I was never aware of AECA.

I came to my current position as the director of the Cooloon Children's Centre Inc. in 1990 and was delighted to learn about AECA—an organisation that supported young children and teachers. The rest is, as they say, history, with my involvement in AECA growing; first regionally and then at state and national levels.

Many of the issues currently faced by those who care about young children still lie in the fact that children are seen to be part of someone else, rather than individuals in their own right.

We know many decisions about which service or school children will attend are often based not on what's best for the child, but on what we can afford or what is available.

We know families have become more isolated and children are often raised without formal or informal support. The numbers of vulnerable children—and the incidence of abuse—are increasing, despite the amount of money invested in these areas.

We know the status of early childhood professionals has diminished, creating a lack of appropriately trained early childhood staff at all levels.

We know that our busy lives, juggling family and careers, often don't allow for a child's childhood to unfold at his/her own pace. My own son at four used to sometimes say as we raced out the door, 'Can we please stay home today, Mum?' We sometimes forget young children only need to know what they need for today; they do not always need to be learning for tomorrow or some bright future.

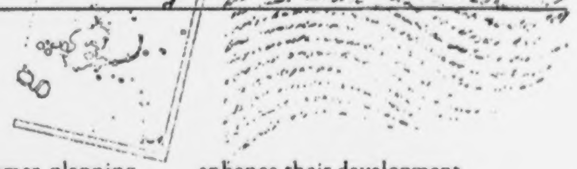
We know government does not often clearly articulate, or perhaps even consider, the impact changes in policy can have on the lives of families and children.

It is my view that AECA, with its mission ' ... to ensure that the best interests of the child and the principles of social justice and quality are paramount in all matters relating to the child ... ', must continue to stand up for young children and make a difference.

The expertise around the AECA national executive table, the commitment and skills of our staff, the breadth of our members, and the strengths of our branches all contribute to our knowledge, and give us the strength and unity to be a *voice for young children*.

Judy Radich
President
Australian Early Childhood Association

Realising visions in early childhood



It seems like only yesterday we were planning for the millennium celebrations, and articulating our visions for the new decade and century. Now, as the year 2000 draws to a close, it is time to realise the visions, consolidate the plans, and move into top gear.

The Centenary of Federation in January 2001 is an important marker of the maturity of our nation. With this maturity should come a genuine understanding of the needs of the community, and especially children and families.

Central to the community's needs, future harmony, and prosperity is education for its children. And good education services for children and families are necessary and expensive. In particular, maximising social, cognitive, and physical development for children aged up to five in group settings is a resource-intensive, hence expensive, effort.

Appropriately qualified early childhood staff are essential to ensure that programs enhance each child's potential growth and development. Yet, despite research that highlights the inextricable link between qualifications of early childhood personnel and learning outcomes for children, staffing is under threat at present. Young children must have the best quality staff if their experiences in group care are to promote their cognitive and social development.

Will we need to wait until the Bicentenary of Federation before all families can access community-funded preschool care and education, with well qualified early childhood professionals, just as we have community-funded care and education services for children over five years of age?

As we move into summer, planning for the year ahead becomes a priority. It's a time of staff change, transitions for families and children, and a time to welcome new early childhood graduates from our colleges and universities.

Increasingly, child care services in many parts of the country, especially outer suburban areas of large cities, cannot recruit qualified staff. When employment options are buoyant, staffing less attractive jobs becomes difficult, and many child care services do have relatively unattractive employment conditions. Shift work, low pay, and low status are not conducive to attracting or keeping quality staff. Competent, well-qualified early childhood staff have many options. In particular, they find early childhood settings in schools—with better pay, conditions, and holidays—more attractive. And because many early childhood staff are young and adventurous they travel, move to other careers, or seek further educational opportunities. Some decide to stay home and care for their own young children.

The danger is that government, industry, and the community might take the 'easy road' and simply change regulations to compensate for the apparent shortage of qualified early childhood staff. This cannot be allowed to happen. As highlighted in many studies, well-qualified staff do make a difference to children's wellbeing. Young children must have the best quality staff if their experiences in group care are to enhance their development.

Importantly, professional development and growth underpins quality in early childhood services. And *Every Child*—through the resources of the Australian Early Childhood Association and our experts in the field—focuses on current issues, research, and practice to keep early childhood professionals up-to-date, challenging us to think about issues.

As highlighted in many studies, well-qualified staff do make a difference to children's wellbeing.

In our lead feature, Mimi Wellisch suggests that early childhood educators might be leaving reading instruction too late. What is your response to her ideas? On a very pragmatic note, Susan Galletly explains the importance of phonological awareness in reading, and Lynette Duffy outlines the role of augmentative communication for children with special needs who have limited language production. In the final feature, Gabrielle Leigh writes about involving parents through training in information and communication technology skills. This reminds us of the importance of working with parents to build enduring and supportive connections.

Alison Elliott

SHOULD WE TEACH YOUNG CHILDREN TO READ?

Why are there so many children who never learn to read well? After all, every promising new reading technique, system, and innovation has been implemented in schools over time—phonics, sight reading, choral reading, word attack skills, Systematic Reading Instruction, and more. Despite all these efforts, too many children continue to experience problems in learning to read at school. I believe that we are looking in the wrong place for the answers, and that failure to teach children to read is due to three taboos.

The first taboo

... is that of teaching academic subjects to children during their early childhood years.

How else can we explain why we have failed to make the connection *that learning to speak and learning to read are both language skills and should occur simultaneously*, despite brain and developmental research findings that there is a 'window of opportunity' for language acquisition up to age four?

We know from research that toddlers can understand many more words than they can speak. Anyone with experience with toddlers can verify this fact and relate stories about how toddlers enjoy fetching their teddy or some other object upon request long before they can pronounce the name of the object. At this stage of their development, and especially around two years of age, children learn to speak any language at a breakneck speed. This is due to a process known as *fast mapping*, when toddlers learn new words after only one encounter with the concept (Weiten, 1998). During this time, then, learning Braille or learning to read would also be more easily acquired, because the brain does not differentiate between various languages or a *type* of language that is being learnt. It has always seemed incongruous to me that we teach children to read after this sensitive period, when they go to school.

The second taboo

... is a professional taboo: the maintenance of the differentiation between preschool/long day care and school.

There has always been an uneasy truce between early childhood educators and schoolteachers, an unsaid but well-understood sanction by schools that preschool was for play only, and serious teaching should be left to the real teachers. This, in turn, has suited early childhood teachers, because they could then have a distinctly separate role, and survive as a profession. So we have left the teaching of reading to schools, and saved schoolteachers the trouble of revising their teaching notes—a major task, should children come to school able to read!

Instead we have politely offered pre-reading activities ad nauseam for decades. Of course, pre-reading activities are better than no action on reading at all, and they are certainly offered with the best of intentions, although some such activities may be ineffectual. For instance, we have been led to believe that environmental print helps children to learn to read eventually, just like one would imagine that hearing a foreign language would help a child learn the language.

However, my four children did not learn their second languages (Danish and Hungarian) at home because, although the languages were spoken *around* them, no one actually addressed them *directly*, or engaged them in conversation. In the same way, having print around in the environment seems like a good idea. But if words are not taught or brought to children's attention, they disregard them, just like they disregard other stimuli in order to focus on what is at hand. It is therefore my argument that having print around in the environment is not enough. We actually have to *read* the words to the children, explain their significance, and deliberately introduce words to ensure that children take notice.

> *... If parents are capable of teaching their children to speak, they are equally capable of teaching them to read*

Recent research into literacy practices in early childhood centres suggests that such practices have not always been practised seriously (McNaught, 1999). Certainly, judging by the reading problems experienced by children at school, pre-reading activities have had little impact. Besides, pre-reading activities seem a little wasted, like showing a child who wants to learn to ride a bike a picture of a bicycle, instead of putting the child on a bicycle and telling him or her how to peddle. No child has ever learned to ride a bike by looking at a picture, and few children would learn to read from vague pre-reading exercises. Children learn to read by practising reading.

The third taboo

... is that of parents teaching their children to read.

First, it has always been implied, and still is, that teaching children to read is a mysterious process too complicated for the average mum and dad, or even an average teacher (Armitage, 1999). This is, of course, untrue. If parents are capable of teaching their children to speak, they are equally capable of teaching them to read, provided they themselves can read. And second, there has been an unspoken injunction on parents not to teach children too early lest the children get bored at school. (As a parent, I have always found this injunction particularly galling.)

Is it hot-housing?

Teaching young children anything 'schooley' has nasty terms attached to it, terms such as 'hot-housing'. Children should play, so the rhetoric goes. But children of all cultures enjoy practising what adults do, including hunting and gathering (Fleer, 1999). In our culture, one important adult activity is reading. Personally, I am a proponent of play, being a passionate early childhood educator. But that has not stopped me from teaching an interested child to read, or providing individual children with information when they have had a special interest. I believe in giving children what they want and what they are ready for individually. I believe that by teaching young children to read we empower them, rather than rob them of their childhoods.

Besides, young children do not always play. We know only too well that they watch an average of two or three hours of television each day. They also play computer and video games. But even watching television is seen by the early childhood hierarchy as a more acceptable pastime than teaching children reading, so long as children watch *quality* programs. I am yet to be convinced that these activities are somehow more beneficial than learning to read for five minutes each day—which is all it would take to teach a young child to read (Doman, 1994).

> *We know that toddlers can understand many more words than they can speak*

So, as more than half of all children under five years of age are now in outside care in Australia, I believe it is time to come out of the cupboard and re-examine our teaching responsibilities in the area of reading. It may mean more work for schoolteachers, and even a blurring of the lines between preschool and school. But at least the children would not have to wait to start the reading process until they go to school—and until, for many, it is too late.

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A pilot reading program

Last year, Dorrigo Preschool ran a pilot reading program, with the parent committee's approval, by teaching children their favourite word.

Rationale

1. Dorrigo is a rural preschool, and it can be difficult to find jobs in the country.
2. Recent research has shown that it is more difficult for people with reading problems to secure jobs.
3. General alarm over high level of reading problems in schools, as well as problems caused by adult illiteracy.
4. Young children can learn to read easily and quickly.

The program

Twenty-four four-year-olds participated in the program. The setting was group time, and teaching averaged five minutes each day. We started off with one child's favourite word, adding new words until all children had a word. Words were written on flashcards in large red lettering, which we read out together. Flashcards were shuffled often, to avoid rote learning. Sometimes words were compared for length and letter content, e.g. 'Tom's word is fish, and Anna's word is frog—can you see how they are similar/different?' No child ever moaned 'not that again', as they do when it is rest time.

Results

At the end of the pilot, ability ranged from one child who did not recognise any words, to the top reader with 21 words. Children who attended one day per week hardly made gains beyond the first weeks, with an average of three words, whereas two-day children averaged 13 words by the end of the program. Lack of adequate repetition and time lapse between exposure seemed to be factors here. Interestingly, children did not necessarily learn their own words first, with popular children's words taking precedent, although by the end of the pilot most knew their own words. They took great interest in the ownership of words, making reading a very social experience. For instance, when they failed to recognise a word, they often remembered it if I reminded them whose word it was. One cannot help wondering how many words these four-year-old children would have learned if they could have read every day of the week.

Augmentative communication

Assisting special needs children

Many special needs children who have difficulty with language experience frustration at not being able to be clearly understood. The quality of the interactions a child has with the people around him or her can hinge upon their communicative competence, and can have a significant effect on a child's social development (Peterson, 1996). Vialle, Lysaght and Verenikina (2000) highlight the enormous impact of successful communication on the overall development of the child. As educators, our role in assisting children with communication difficulties may require us to set up alternatives to oral and verbal communication. One such alternative is to implement augmentative communication processes.

Augmentative communication is the use of objects, pictures, and symbols to assist and enhance the communicative process (Kirk & Gallagher, 1989). Using such a process, the child is encouraged to point to objects, pictures, or symbols which represent meaning (Hand, 1998). A child may indicate the desire for a drink by pointing to a cup, a picture of a cup, or a symbol of a cup, depending on their level of understanding. Augmentative communication processes are not a substitute for oral or verbal communication but should supplement verbal attempts where possible. Augmentative communication resources can be as simple as an *object board*—objects and pictures glued or attached with velcro to a board. Additionally, a range of high technology resources such as speech synthesisers are available (Hand, 1998). It is important that any augmentative resources fit the five following criteria. They must be:

- portable;
- accessible;
- useful to the child;
- flexible; and
- multi-dimensional.

Object boards are a useful starting point when using augmentative communication aids, especially with severely impaired children or very young children (Bloomberg & Johnson, 1990). A child may choose from a range of available activities by selecting from the board a paintbrush to represent painting, a piece of a puzzle to represent puzzles, or a dough cutter to represent play dough. The realistic nature of the actual objects ensures that children do not need to make links to symbolic representations of the same objects. However, these boards are seldom portable.

Alternatives are to move toward photographs and then symbols. Care must be taken to ensure that the child has a clear understanding that the photograph represents the real object and that the symbol represents the photograph and the object. While the use of photographs—which realistically depict the actual objects a child sees and uses—is important, it is also worthwhile to consider the use of commercially produced pictures which are often of better quality.

Routines and procedures

Children with special needs can have difficulty following the daily routines of the classroom. Augmentative communication provides a way of visually illustrating these routines, which helps ease the demands made on the child. This is particularly valuable when changes to the routine are imminent. A visual timetable might include pictures, symbols, or objects to represent the significant times in the daily routine, e.g. inside play, snack, group story, toilet, etc. The pictures are sequenced according to the sequence of the day. Velcro is a very handy way of ensuring flexibility. The timetable can be discussed with the whole group at the beginning of each day, so that any changes to routines are illustrated. It is also useful to remove the representation of each part of the day as it is completed, e.g. after story time, the story picture is removed. This clearly demonstrates to the child that this activity is finished and he or she can then visually focus on the next picture in the sequence.

Children's decision-making

The use of augmentative communication illustrations can provide an easy-to-follow prompt for children when they are making choices of activities. Children can be encouraged to view the presented options, make a choice and take that object to the activity area. As a child develops this skill, representations may move to pictures or symbols. A variety of choices for outdoor activities may be presented on a board. Children can point to and select which activity they would like to do. Corresponding pictures or symbols can be attached to areas in the playground, e.g. climbing frame, sandpit area, etc.

Rules and behaviours

Augmentative communication is a valuable aid for reinforcing rules and behavioural codes of conduct. A useful way of reminding children about rules and behaviours is to implement rule or behaviour books. These books can be referred to as *What To Do Books* (ACAQ, 1997). The books are individually made to illustrate, in a step-by-step manner, what a child should do in a particular situation.

A small individual book made especially for a child to hold during group story may help the child remember the appropriate story listening behaviour. It is essential that these books show every step in the process. An example may be:

When it is story time
I sit in the carpet
I sit in front of the teacher
Other children will sit near me
I cross my legs
I put my hands in my lap
I look at the book
I look at the teacher
I listen to the story

What To Do Books are most effective when they are phrased in very positive terminology. 'I put my hands in my lap' is likely to be much more effective than 'I don't touch anyone'.

What To Do Books can also be used when inappropriate behaviour arises. Again, in a step-by-step manner they might describe what a child can do when he or she is upset or angry; for example:

When I am angry
I can stop
I can walk away
I can find a quiet place
I can rest
I can find a teacher
I can show the teacher

Communication

Many children experience frustration when they are not clearly understood. Augmentative communication develops an avenue of reciprocal communication where children may both understand and be understood by others. It is also portable, and can develop and encourage interaction in any environment from the sandpit to the theatre. Key word flashcards can be a useful aid when leaving the centre. Key words such as 'help', 'toilet', 'friend', 'drink', etc., can help a child communicate their needs when away from the resources of the centre. These cards can be attached to a loop and worn on the belt, wrist, or as a necklace.

Augmentative communication is valuable because it is not reliant on an individual's level of signing skills, although it can be used as a precursor or supplement to signing. The use of photographs, illustrations, and real objects in the communication process allows all participants to be effectively understood. This can be a significant advantage over signing systems (Heward, 1996), but is not a replacement of such systems, merely one of a range of options in a multi-dimensional approach.

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Augmentative communication in action

At snack time Nicole's teacher presents her with a set of five pictures of fruit, and pictures which represent *more, yummy* and *yucky*. When asked to choose which fruit she would like, Nicole quickly points to banana and apple. The children next to her choose mango, and Nicole vocalises, pulls a face and points to the picture for mango and the symbol for yucky.

Nicole's teacher discovered that Nicole could recognise pictures because she was able to point to pictures of objects and activities during book reading. What she needed to learn was that touching pictures could be a way of communicating. Her teacher began by using the pictures herself to support her own spoken language before she tried to get Nicole to use them. She made pictures part of the preschool environment by 'labelling' toy containers, equipment, and cupboards with pictures. She used single pictures backed with velcro placed onto small carpet boards to support her conversation about fruit choices for morning tea. She used similar boards to support conversation about picture books, songs and play, and craft activities. She used a pictorial daily routine to orient children to the daily routine and referred back to it with Nicole each time activities changed and to tell her about available choices.

At snack time she began by asking Nicole about her preferences, touching the pictures and the actual fruit as she spoke. As the adults talked with the children about their choices, they touched the picture each time the particular fruit was mentioned. Nicole quickly realised she could use pictures to demonstrate her choices and interact with others. Once Nicole could use pictures to refer to objects, her teacher introduced interaction helpers like more, yummy, and yucky to talk about food preferences. She could have introduced these at the beginning, but felt more confident concentrating on pictures and objects at first.

Staff are finding that Nicole is communicating more, using a mix of pictures, gestures, and vocalisations. Her vocalisations are becoming more comprehensible as staff consistently model the spoken words for the pictures she uses. She will often initiate a request or a short conversation using pictures. Staff find that when they know the topic of conversation, her non-verbal means of communication can be quite expressive.

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IT'S TIME FOR PHONOLOGICAL FUN

Playing with sounds (and letters)

Children learn through play. We know this and we encourage children to learn through fun activities and games, which assist them in their mastery of communication and social skills; co-ordination skills; logical reasoning skills; spatial and mathematical skills; and awareness of the printed word. Encouraging play with the alphabet and words when children are learning their letters and sounds is a vital part of developing children's literacy skills.

Numerous studies over the past three decades (Adams, 1990, Gough, Ehri & Treiman, 1992, Byrne & Fielding-Barnsley, 1995) have established that phonological awareness is vital if children are to become effective readers and writers. Phonological awareness leads to skill with the sounds and syllables of words. It includes skills with syllables; rhyming; identifying sounds at the beginning, end, and middle of words; listing sounds in words; and recognising the word made by blending a list of sounds together. Although many of us are already encouraging informal play in phonological areas, there are some research findings which suggest we should do things a little differently. Some of these key principles of learning in the pre-reading area follow.

Success in reading and writing

Many researchers feel that the primary mechanism enabling early reading success is phonological awareness. While other skills such as non-verbal intelligence, vocabulary, and being read to extensively do make significant independent contributions to determining how well a child will read and write, phonological awareness stands out as the major indicator. Young children with well-developed phonological awareness skills are far more likely to be good readers and writers, while children with poorly developed phonological awareness are highly likely to have significant difficulties mastering reading and spelling.

Understanding letter, sound, and word relationships

English is an alphabetic code and its logic is based on our system of phonemes (sounds represented by letters). Children's phonological skill enables them to grasp the logic of the letter, sound, and word relationships in English text. It is this awareness that enables them to develop understanding of the alphabetic principle:

- Each letter has a sound.
- Saying the sounds of letters in a word helps you read an unfamiliar word.
- Writing the letters which make the sounds in a word allows you to spell a word.

Mastering the alphabetic principle underpins the development of effective reading and writing skills.

Knowledge of letters a predictor of reading success

A child's knowledge of individual letters at a young age is also a predictor of later reading success, although not as strong a predictor as is phonological awareness.

Skills can be taught effectively

Phonological awareness skills can be developed extremely effectively even in children aged three and four years. Weak phonological skills can be boosted, with these children then able to go on to develop appropriate literacy skills.

Phonetics more effective with training in letter knowledge

Success in literacy is greatly improved when phonological awareness training is combined with training in letter knowledge. It is generally felt that this is because the logic of phonological awareness supports the logic of letters representing the sounds of words, helping children to master the alphabetic principle earlier and more effectively. The use of sensory items such as plastic letters and letter tiles further increases the effectiveness of such pre-reading instruction.

Small selection of letters sufficient for training

It is not necessary for children to be 'taught' all letters for mastery of the alphabetic principle to occur. Effective learning happens when a small subset of perhaps five or six letters is used. This is good news in that pre-reading skills can be built without large amounts of time and energy used learning all the letters.

Direct instruction in phonological awareness is far more successful than indirect approaches

Rather than simply exposing children to print concepts as part of a general teaching program, it's found that children benefit most from specific, direct instruction in these areas. Why? Many children do not always make the correct inferences about sounds, letters, and their roles unless concepts are specifically explained and they are given many opportunities to practise. Unfortunately, the children with weaker phonological skills—and most at risk of experiencing learning difficulties—are those who are least efficient at learning through general exposure to language and literacy concepts. Explicit teaching works.

Game formats work very effectively for direct instruction in phonological and letter awareness.

When we think about early learning of letters and sounds, some of us automatically visualise rigid deskwork and repetitious drill work. The reality is that skills are achieved most effectively through the use of structured play formats providing fun practice opportunities with sound characters, puppets, plastic letters, and letter tiles, which can be enjoyed by all.

When do phonological skills develop naturally?

Phonological skills such as rhyming, isolating sounds in words, blending sounds to make words, and listing the sounds of words, do not develop properly in many children until they are over six years of age, even in a language- and print-rich environment. This presents a challenge in most Australian schools, where children's first year of formal literacy instruction occurs when they are five to six years of age. If children do not possess adequately developed phonological skills at the time when school instruction on reading and spelling of small regular words occurs, they will be unable to master the alphabetic principle and succeed at these critical literacy sub-skills. Many children can be enormously disadvantaged at this early stage and go on to literacy failure simply because their natural phonological skill development did not match their school's learning agenda. Fortunately, it is relatively simple to develop phonological awareness at younger ages, so this potentially big problem can be avoided.

Conclusion

While some of the above points seem to challenge some current methods used in developing pre-reading skills, they have an inherent logic and are well worth serious contemplation. For many, the ideas of explicit literacy skill instruction, and of young children working directly with letters, may seem a little threatening. But many of us can remember healthy and happy preschoolers we have worked with, well-developed in all aspects of previous preschool curricula, who inexplicably went on to literacy skill failure. Phonological skill development is the key to literacy progress.

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Cueing systems readers use from an early age:

Readers make use of the all of the following four cueing systems as they strive to make meaning.

1. Semantics—the meanings of words: For example, to complete the sentence 'The cowboy jumped on his __________ and rode away,' readers draw on their knowledge of cowboys and riding and predict that the missing word is horse, pony, or stallion. Readers constantly ask themselves: 'Does that make sense?' They know that reading is about predicting and anticipating on the basis of meaning.
2. Grapho-phonics—visual features, such as the shape and size of words, and sound-letter knowledge: For example, to complete the sentence 'The _a_ purred after lapping its milk.' On the basis of meaning, the reader may predict 'kitten' which makes sense and is grammatically correct. However, in considering the visual clues and the available phonic information, the reader predicts that the missing word is 'cat'.
3. Syntax—the grammar of the language: Young children learn quickly that grammatical patterns in English are fairly predictable and that 'Cat is the on mat the' is nonsensical. They expect that the author's intention is to make sense and not to confuse or baffle the reader.
4. Pragmatics—the situational context: Readers become familiar with a range of text types and build up expectations of how different texts work—for example, a fairy story begins with 'Once upon a time', a newspaper is organised in columns and consists primarily of short reports, a shopping list contains items to be purchased and usually is written in columns.

Source: Lifting the Lid on Early Childhood Literacy, *by Kaye Lowe. Canberra: AECA (2000)*

'Casting the Net' to new parents

A number of parents of school beginners have beaten their children to the school's computers. Instead of the five-year-olds sitting in front of computer screens their parents are occupying the seats. At Greensborough Primary School an Internet community skilling program has been offered to parents of prospective students. The Internet program, called 'Greensborough 2000—*Casting the Net*' has been running for over a year. Phase one targeted parents of existing students at Greensborough. Phase two encourages diversity by including other local community members, grandparents, and prospective parents. As part of the transition program the school offered places for preschool parents to learn new skills specifically about the Internet.

The course entails six hours of hands-on sessions and 10 hours of Internet access on the school's networked computers. The participants share the school's computer facility and all receive a comprehensive user's guide complied by Greensborough Primary School. Participants are taught basic Internet skills, how to use a search engine and research on the Internet. By the end of the course everyone has an email address and has developed a raft of communication skills. The Victorian Government and Skills.net have recognised this school initiative. After a successful application the school was awarded money to create the program and establish meaningful community links. The enthusiasm and commitment of the school's teachers and students have made it possible.

How does this program help the children?

This program seeks to assist children and parents with schooling in the 'knowledge era'. If parents do not understand the extent and range of educational Internet activities, then how can a learning environment be created at home? One basic aim of the school is to help parents gain information and communications technology (ICT) skills. However, the underlying intent of *Casting the Net* lies in developing a meaningful educational partnership in education. The knowledge, skills and understanding gained from this course are of lesser importance than the idea of establishing school and community connectivity.

Over recent years, educators have given many reasons for developing school and community links. Dauber and Epstein (1993), Cairney (1997), and Henry (1996) furnish an extensive rationale, including enhancement of parent–teacher relationships and accountability structures, provision of additional resources for a school, and the positive effect on student outcomes. The theories are grounded on valid rationale with well-documented findings.

The overriding reason for advancing parent participation in schooling is the clear relationship with student learning outcomes. Epstein (1987) has established that parental involvement positively affects children's achievements, attitudes, and aspirations, even when ability and socio-economic status are taken into account. As educators we cannot ignore the significance of this link in terms of learning and the core business of schools. Yet, in establishing school/community links, the aim is not just to teach parents and call that involvement, but to develop active partnerships.

In light of the changing needs in schooling and a more comprehensive knowledge of the variables of interaction, Cairney and Munsie (1992) determined three broad types of communications:

- one way;
- information sharing; and
- idea exchange.

Of particular relevance is the progression of the communications, starting with one way communication and moving to idea exchange. It will be interesting to explore how far an ICT course can facilitate a higher order communications strategy. However, by understanding the potential of communications between home and school we can, as educators, plan relevant educational objectives in the future.

The effects of the program

A number of educators advocate the importance of two-way communication enhancing a sense of community. Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) believe the school is one of the last hopes for 'rescuing and reinventing community' (p.9).

They define the power of community—in 'place, mind and friendship'—whilst reinforcing the importance of the school in reframing these relationships (pp.61–64). Bringing the community on-site, listening, acknowledging differences, and extending to levels of friendship and kinship are complex issues. It takes time to build awareness and requires a deep level of understanding. Nevertheless, the school must be perceived as relevant and responsive to the needs of its prime stakeholders. The education of the children requires multiskilling. Their parents require multiskilling, too. Greensborough Primary School is taking an active stance by addressing these issues in practise.

In certain communities, especially those that are economically disadvantaged, there is a growing mismatch between an individual's ICT knowledge and the application of ICT in their child's education. Tapscott (1998) discusses a digital divide where access and knowledge are distinguishing variables. The potential polarisation between the 'knows and the do-not-knows' is growing with rapid technological expansion. The divide is evident within some school communities, where there appears to be a real mismatch with understanding, skills, knowledge, and attitudes about ICT. Learning with computers and researching on the Internet at school may have no application, understanding, and reinforcement in a home setting if parents do not have skills or awareness of the possibilities and mutual benefits.

We must acknowledge that learning does not just take place in schools. Some learning originates at school and extends into the community, and the reverse is also true. Structures need to be set in place to ensure overlap between the critical contexts; otherwise there will be significant discrepancies in equity and opportunities for learning. How can children gain reinforcement and assistance if their home is alienated from the new technologies?

Is it the task of the school to extend the tools for learning required in the knowledge age? These questions are starting to be addressed by schools and other educational settings. *Casting the Net* at Greensborough Primary School has provided participants with a number of new skills, confidence, and understandings in the realm of lifelong learning. Clearly, it presents a real opportunity to create meaningful two-way links with the community and establish authentic educative partnerships.

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Parents' views

Casting the Net seeks to encourage significant educative partnerships between home and community. The aim of the project was to increase understanding about the connectivity potential. In the research model, participants were given questionnaires which looked at skills, understanding, attitudes, and usage.

In one item they were asked: 'How do computers link the school and community at Greensborough Primary School?' Two typical responses were:

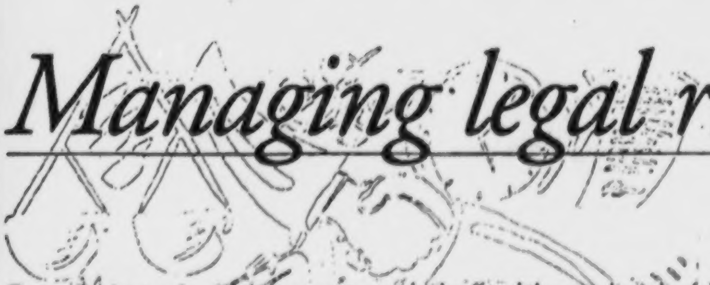
> *Email can be handy to send information. If people are online at home and unable to get to school they can still make contact.*
>
> *By allowing all members of the community the chance to learn.*

Already the two-way communication potential between the school and home has been acknowledged. This was evident in a few preschool parents, even before they became formal members of the school community.

To investigate anticipated learning requirements, I looked at the attitudes and perceived skills necessary to support schooling. When asked the question: 'How do you think this course will help in the education of your child/children' two parents of preschoolers responded:

> *This is the future for my children and I would like to be able to keep up with them.*
>
> *I will be able to understand and become involved with this facet of my children's learning. We can learn together.*

A month after the completion of the *Casting the Net* program at Greensborough Primary School, participants were asked again about their attitudes, understanding, usage, and skill development. The pre- and post-course responses were made. There was discernable growth in each of the four variables. A number of parents and potential parents acknowledged the powerful impact of computers and the Internet, and took steps to address this issue. This ensured enhanced communication between home and school.



Managing legal risks

Managing legal risks is never an easy task, but occasionally a case comes along which serves as a reminder of how difficult it can be. In a recent case a child care worker sued her employer for workers' compensation on behalf of herself and the child she alleged was injured during her pregnancy.

The plaintiff gave birth to a seriously disabled child who suffered from cerebral palsy. She sued her employer, claiming that she had been exposed to the cytomegalo virus (CMV) at the child care centre where she worked in the 'babies' room'.

The court had to decide whether the plaintiff had been exposed to CMV before or after she became pregnant. The parties agreed that, if the case against the child care centre was successful, the mother would be awarded $150,000 and her child $4.5 million.

In order to win her case the mother had to prove that she and her child had suffered due to a breach of duty of care by the child care centre. She claimed that her employer was negligent in allowing her to work with babies while she was pregnant, and should have known that pregnant women working with babies had a higher risk than usual of passing CMV on to the foetus. She also claimed that her employer was negligent by not requiring her to have a blood test to determine her immune status and for not warning her of the risk of passing CMV on to her unborn child.

During the case, evidence was called about medical articles that warned of these risks. The child care worker's evidence (which the judge believed) was that the only high-risk disease she knew of was rubella.

The judge found that the warnings given to staff about the risks of CMV were inadequate, and that the staff development program did not address that issue specifically. It was found that the training for hygiene and infection strongly focused on the protection of the children, rather than the carers.

The employer was found to be negligent in failing to warn staff of the risks associated with working with children not yet toilet-trained. The 'absence of toileting skills was identified as one of a number of factors greatly increasing the risk of transmission of infection and was placing carers at risk'. For this reason, the judge found the employer negligent in transferring her to the 'babies' room' when it was known she was in the early stages of pregnancy.

Although the judge found that the employer was negligent, to win the case the child care worker had to prove that her child suffered as a direct result of her work-related exposure to CMV during pregnancy.

CMV is a herpes virus, which can persist and reactivate. The medical evidence demonstrated that the mother may have had the infection sometime in the past and it is extremely common for it to reactivate during pregnancy. Seventy per cent of adults infected with CMV have no symptoms. Studies presented during the hearing showed that carers working with children aged under two years tested positive in 50 per cent of cases when they had had been working in that environment for more than five years.

The child care worker was unable to prove on the balance of probabilities that she was infected during her pregnancy rather than as the result of an infection she had suffered during her years as a carer reactivating. If she had proved that the primary infection had occurred during her pregnancy she would have been successful in her claim for injury under the Workers' Compensation Act.

While the child care worker was not successful on this occasion, the case has some interesting implications. Workers' compensation claims in New South Wales can now extend to cover harm if the injury is to an unborn child. Women of child-bearing age employed in the child care sector will now be regarded as being in a high-risk occupation. Employers are responsible for warning of the risks of CMV, for relocating pregnant staff away from high-risk factors (such as children aged under two), and for confirming employees' immune status in respect of CMV. Workers' compensation premiums may rise as a result of this decision.

Marianne Robinson
Compliance Consultant

Children and child care

Outcomes to age six

Longitudinal research findings into the effects of child care were presented for the first time at the Family and Community Services *Panel Data and Policy Conference* in May 2000. At the conference, the Minister, Senator Jocelyn Newman, emphasised the Commonwealth Government's commitment to supporting and drawing on longitudinal research in the development of social policies. Harrison and Ungerer's study, which examines child outcomes at ages one, two-and-a half, and six years, has important implications for child care policy decisions.

In the 1980s and early '90s the Commonwealth's Children's Services Program oversaw massive growth in government-funded child care, with a resulting increase in employment rates of women with young children and the number of children receiving regular non-maternal care. These changes focused attention on the effect of infant child care on infant-mother attachment (Belsky, 1990; NICHD, 1997), and the long-term effects of early child care on children's social, emotional, and cognitive development (NICHD, 1998; Ochiltree & Edgar, 1995).

Harrison and Ungerer's research had three main aims: (1) to compare child outcomes for formal versus informal types of care; (2) to determine whether amount of care contributed to variations in development; and (3) to examine the effects of changes to children's care arrangements over time. Child outcomes were assessed longitudinally, covering key stages in development: infant–mother attachment at age one, social competence with peers at age two-and-a-half, and adjustment to school at age six.

Results

Type of care

Results supported the expectation that the use of formal, government-regulated care would not be detrimental to children's development. Children who had received early formal care were more likely to be securely attached as infants and tended to be more effective with peers at early preschool-age, compared to those receiving informal care. At school-age, they were were rated by their teachers as better adjusted academically: more independent, more task-oriented, showing more intelligent behaviour, and having fewer learning difficulties.

Amount of care

At ages one and two-and-a-half years, there were no negative effects of part- or full-time child care on attachment security or preschool social competence. At school-age, however, children who had received long hours of care in the first two-and-a-half years were rated by their teachers as less well adjusted to the academic demands of the classroom, compared to children who had received minimal or part-time hours. The poorest ratings occurred when children had received long hours of informal care.

Stability of care

The number of changes in care arrangements did not affect child outcomes at age one or two-and-a-half years. At school-age, however, children whose pattern of child care had been less stable across the birth-to-age-six period were rated by their teachers as less well adjusted behaviourally: less considerate, more hostile, and less prosocial, compared to children whose care had been more stable.

Implications for policy

This research provides empirical evidence for the benefits of Australia's government-regulated child care system and underlines the importance of providing quality child care in the first two-and-a-half years of life. Evidence consistent with previous survey data (Vaughn, 1995) also showed that many families used informal child care. Harrison and Ungerer argue that all non-parental care would benefit from quality assurance measures and a supervisory and support system similar to that provided in formal, family day care services.

Linda J. Harrison
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Charles Sturt University
Judy A. Ungerer
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Macquarie University

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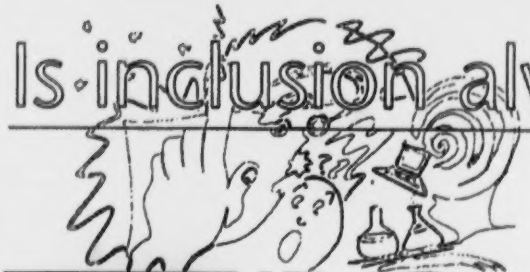
N.B. This article is extracted from *Children and child care: A longitudinal study of the relationships between developmental outcomes and use of non-parental care from birth to six*, available from Dr Harrison.
Email: lharrison@csu.edu.au

Is inclusion always the answer



Nemarluk School is a primary school in Darwin that provides educational programs for students with moderate, severe, and profound disabilities. Term 2, 1998 saw the opening of the Early Childhood Unit within the school to provide extra options for preschool age children. Traditionally the provision of Early Intervention Services and Special School Educational programs had been provided on separate campuses.

In 1995 the Early Intervention Centre was relocated from Carpentaria Disability Services to Malak Primary School and changed its method of service delivery. Preschool-aged students were included into their local preschools and supported by visiting advisory teachers, therapists, and inclusion support assistants (ISAs).

This method of service delivery has worked well; it is efficient and provides meaningful programs for the majority of students. However, after a year of operation it was found that there was a handful of children whose needs were not being met by this form of intervention. Some parents and educators felt that a more intensive program was required, designed specifically for children with severe and/or multiple disabilities. A working party was established to look into the possibility of establishing a small, intensive group as a further option for these children. The idea at this stage was supported by the NT Education Department Early Intervention team, Carpentaria Disability Services who provided the therapy input, student services, and the local special school. Parents who had initiated the discussions were anxious to turn the concept into a working model.

Nemarluk School was able to provide space to conduct the program. Negotiations to secure funding to provide a teacher and teacher assistant took time. While a submission was being considered by the Education Department, the working party determined philosophy and method of operation. A service using professionals from three different organisations to provide support requires a high level of communication, collaboration, and consultation. Roles and responsibilities were established at an early stage and were agreed to by all concerned.

Two students were enrolled initially in the early childhood unit and a further three by August. The program has been operating for nearly five months now and, despite a few teething troubles, it appears to be successful. A maximum of five students has been established for the group.

Parents are happy with what the school provides, and improvements in the students' performance have already been noted.

The aim of the Early Childhood Unit is to focus on individual children's strengths. New strategies are continually developing in consultation with the parents, who actively participate in discussions about their children's development, curriculum planning, and evaluation. Understanding each child in a special way is seen to be the strength of the preschool program.

The highly structured classroom emphasises communication strategies and offers intensive behavioural management. Key signing is practised daily and living skills are taught. The input of therapists—occupational, speech, and physiotherapy—helps these children maximise their potential.

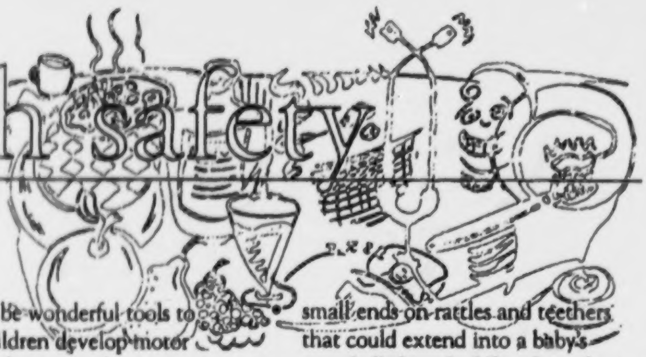
Provision of a range of educational options to cater for the needs of students is stated as part of NT Special Education Policy. One of our next objectives is to link with the neighbouring preschool for part of our social skills program. Thus, parents have the option of inclusion at a preschool; inclusion with support assistance; inclusion and special education program; or special education setting only.

Overall, it's been very exciting to see the development of the Early Childhood Unit in our school, and we look forward to working with these children in the years to come.

Pam Young
Principal, Nemarluk School
Northern Territory

Author's note: The early intervention program has now been running successfully for just over two years. The numbers grew during this year to nine children, necessitating both a morning and afternoon session. Our morning group has been accessing the local preschool group for just over 18 months for one morning a week. We would like to be able to send you a 'Look where they are now' story, but know this is not possible.

Toying with safety



Almost nothing makes a child happier than receiving a toy or game. Sadly though, what seems to be harmless fun can sometimes lead to serious injury. Each year thousands of children are badly hurt by toys, and most of these injuries are preventable.

If adults think carefully about safety when buying toys, injuries can be avoided. This year if your choice for a Christmas gift is a toy, please make sure the one you select is well made and suitable for the child's age group.

Knowing what hazards to look for when buying toys and games can help prevent problems before they occur. This article includes some guidelines on things to check when buying toys.

Professor Kim Oates
Chief Executive
The Children's Hospital at Westmead

Toys can be wonderful tools to help children develop motor skills and exercise their imagination. Unfortunately, children aged under three are particularly vulnerable around unsafe toys. If a toy is designed for children younger than three it should not have parts or pieces so small they can be inhaled or swallowed.

You can do a simple test to check whether a toy is safe for this age group—all you need is a 35mm film canister. If any part of the toy can fit in the canister, it should not be around children under three.

When buying toys for young children, keep in mind the child's age and strength. Toys are sometimes bitten, tugged, sucked, jumped on, and thrown about. Stop and think before making a toy purchase. Follow not only the manufacturer's age level, but your own common sense. Always check for:

- small parts which can be easily chewed off, swallowed, or inhaled;
- sharp edges or points which might cut;
- hinges or springs which could pinch, or gaps in which fingers or toes might get caught, e.g. folding toy prams/ironing boards;
- loose knots or splinters in wooden toys;
- excessively noisy toys—these may damage a child's hearing;
- long strings, ropes, or ribbons which could strangle a child (30cm is long enough);
- weakly stitched seams in stuffed toys—stuffing could be inhaled or swallowed;
- adequate holes for ventilation in toys such as masks, helmets, and tents;
- small ends on rattles and teethers that could extend into a baby's mouth (babies do fall with rattles in their mouths);
- squeeze toys that could be entirely compressed to fit in a child's mouth;
- toxicity of pencils and crayons;
- protective tips or suction caps fitted to objects that are able to be fired from toys. (It is also a good idea to check that other items such as pencils or nails cannot be fired.)

Inspect toys regularly for wear or damage. Repair toys immediately or put them away until they can be repaired. If necessary, discard them now before an accident happens.

Inspect toys regularly for wear or damage

Teach your children to put their toys safely away on shelves or in a cupboard to prevent trips and falls. Toy boxes, too, should be checked for safety. Make sure the box has a lid that will stay open in any position to which it is raised and will not fall on a child. For extra safety, be sure there are ventilation holes in the box.

Teach older children to keep their toys away from younger brothers and sisters, especially those under three. Electric toys which are poorly constructed, wired or misused can shock or burn. Children at the right age should be taught to use electric toys properly, cautiously, and under adult supervision.

Protecting children from unsafe toys is the responsibility of everyone. Careful toy selection and proper supervision of children at play is still—and always will be—the best way to protect children from toy-related injuries.

The Children's Hospital at Westmead

Early childhood specialists in schools

Providing a program for school beginners that captures children's receptiveness and enthusiasm for learning is the goal of every school. Individual diversity—as reflected in entry achievements, cognitive abilities, motivational factors, and learning styles—means that young children need learning programs of different intensities, styles, and strategies if they are to achieve similar educational outcomes.

The employment of specialist early childhood teachers in the first years of school can make individualised programming and teaching a reality.

Early childhood teachers are experienced in implementing pedagogic processes designed to meet the individual learning needs of young children beginning their educational journeys.

Child-centred learning

Belinda Critchley, Executive Teacher at Madang Avenue Public School in Western Sydney, says that perhaps the most important contribution made by the early childhood specialist in a school is a focus on the child as an individual. Because of their understanding of developmentally appropriate practice, specialist early childhood teachers routinely provide individualised, child centred learning programs for children. 'It's second nature', she says.

Comprehensive assessment of children's current learning is important in the first years of school. Baseline information on what children know and what they can do gives teachers a detailed picture of development and provides the starting point for planning and teaching. The challenge for schools is to translate the rhetoric to practice.

Belinda says that specialist early childhood teachers understand the importance of developing skills and concepts in ways that suit the unique learning needs of the young child. They reject rigid, whole-class, and overly formal teaching that has little regard for individual learning requirements. 'Early childhood-trained teachers genuinely know how to develop and maintain a child-centred approach', she says.

Nowhere is the focus on an individualised learning program more critical than in reading. School beginners have different experiential backgrounds, skills, and learning styles. Reading problems begin when young children are confronted with reading tasks for which they are not developmentally ready. Reading problems develop when children are rushed into reading through approaches not suited to their learning needs. They start in programs where all children are taught the same thing at the same time.

Implementing outcomes-based approaches

In recent years, the shift to outcomes-based education in many school systems has seen a renewed focus on the individual learning needs of all children in all grades. This means that teachers wedded to traditional year-based and subject-specific whole class teaching must rethink teaching approaches, so children can achieve outcomes consistent with their developmental needs; outcomes that are assessed in individual performance terms, not on the relative performances of peers.

This transition to outcomes-based education has been difficult for many teachers. For early childhood specialist teachers though, the pathway to outcomes-based education has been relatively smooth.

Early childhood teacher education has long recognised that young children's learning journeys are unique. Essentially, developmentally appropriate practice refers to the structuring of learning experiences that are consistent with each child's developmental needs—social, cognitive, emotional, and physical. Teaching is based on a cycle of observation and documentation of demonstrated achievement.

Early childhood educators are well practised in keeping detailed records of children's achievements to use as a basis for planning and teaching. They employ various observation and documentation techniques and use the results to guide learning experiences. The records of children's progress and samples of their work document the tapestry of each child's development.

Early childhood trained teachers working in today's outcomes-based climate say that their professional background makes monitoring and documenting progress toward outcomes straightforward. They manage the detailed record-keeping and continuous and cyclical process of assessment, planning, and implementation associated with outcomes-based education very well.

Belinda agrees. She says that developmentally appropriate practice and outcomes-based education go hand-in-hand in the school setting. 'Programming needs to be intensive and early childhood teachers are easily able to do this. Extensive reporting to parents on children's development and what they're learning is also essential and this (too) is second nature', she says.

Alison Elliott
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School of Learning Development and
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Young children and mathematics

Possibilities and challenges

During the years from birth to five years, young children acquire considerable mathematical knowledge. Informal experiences in the home and in early childhood settings contribute to mathematical development and provide a solid foundation for the more formal mathematics teaching and learning that occur in schools. Mathematics learning builds on the natural curiosity and enthusiasm of children, and appropriate experiences challenge young children to explore ideas related to patterns, number, shapes, and space (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 2000).

Why are early mathematical experiences important?

- Children learn through exploring their world, so their interests and play activities are natural vehicles for developing mathematical thinking. Everyday experiences provide opportunities for children to learn mathematical concepts such as sorting, reasoning, recording, recognising patterns, and following directions.
- Young children develop their disposition for mathematics at an early age. If their early experiences are positive and supported, children will learn to trust their own abilities to make sense of mathematics.

How can adults support children's mathematical development?

- We can provide stimulating environments where there is time to explore. Adults can provide access to counting books and stories, music, games and songs with directions, and to a wealth of materials that allow children to count, sort, compare, build, and pull apart. Home activites such as cooking, shopping, household maintenance and repairs, and travel provide opportunities for children to observe adults engaged in problem-solving and using mathematics.
- We can support children's development by directing attention to the mathematics they use in their play. Through careful observation, conversations, and guidance, adults can help children to make connections between the mathematics in familiar situations and new ones.
- We can provide for, and encourage, problem-solving. Problem-solving involves the ability to explore, think through an issue, and reason logically. Children can be asked to think of different ways problems can be solved and to discuss their suggested solutions.
- We can ensure that the environment is rich in language and that children are encouraged to ask questions. Mathematical language should be modelled in meaningful contexts so children learn words for comparing, for indicating position and direction, and for counting and labelling objects. Children need to be encouraged to express ideas in a range of ways, including words, diagrams, pictures, and symbols.
- We can help children recognise that mathematics relates to their own experience, knowledge, and language. Children find mathematics easier if they can apply common rules to a number of different situations.
- We can allow children to develop at their own pace. To develop confidence and skill, children need opportunities to repeat experiences. For example, accurate measurement of liquids involves being able to pour without spilling. Counting out sets of objects requires that children have practised and learned the number names in order.
- We can also encourage children to enjoy learning mathematics. This can occur if children are able to move, touch, taste, and feel things, and are encouraged to explore and ask questions.

Mathematics for young children is more than just 'getting ready' for school. It is a joy, not a pressure. Quality early mathematics is the total of all the experiences young children have from birth as they play in and explore their world. All young children possess substantial mathematical knowledge. This can be successfully built on by the provision of stimulating activities that enable children to solve problems, look for patterns, and think like mathematicians.

Wendy Hawthorne
Lecturer, Faculty of Education
University of Newcastle

Reference

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Sofi Thomson

Early childhood in Indonesia

Indonesia is riding the crest of a wave of political change; at times it rolls smoothly, at times it is wild and turbulent. After 32 years of Suharto's iron-fisted rule, the people of Indonesia struggle cautiously towards an open democracy. The allegedly corrupt former president's wealth is estimated in the tens of billions of dollars, yet rough and rickety chauffeur-pedalled three-wheeler prams called becaks rule the streets, and children often run ragged in the kampungs.

In the midst of this sometimes chaotic scene, a young Australian woman charges through jumbled streets on a small Honda 100cc motorbike like a bandit on a mission. Meet Sofi Thomson.

Sofi is an early childhood consultant working at the Institute for Women and Children's Studies and Development or Lembaga Studi dan Pengembangan Perempuan dan Anak (LSPPA) in Yogyakarta, Indonesia's second-largest city, situated in south central Java. The young team of staff members at LSPPA are also on a mission, that of facilitating equal opportunity and freedom of expression for all human beings. Their main focus is gender equity.

Several years ago at her home in Buderim, Queensland, Sofi began an after-school program for primary school-aged children, called *Young Creators' Workshop*. Here, children could express themselves however they wished using a variety of media.

> ***...These [cultural] differences underline the difficulties faced by educators such as Sofi and the staff at LSPPA***

This led to creativity workshops in schools and child care centres. Sofi's artistic energy came to the attention of the late Loretta Lowe, who started the first child care facilities on the Sunshine Coast. She invited Sofi to join the co-ordination team for the Sunshine Coast North Family Day Care (FDC) Scheme, now known as Maroochy Family Day Care. While working with FDC, Sofi completed a Diploma of Care and Education as well as other programs, including a counselling course. Her training was the consummate package to bring to the LSPPA facility in Yogyakarta, where she has now been for more than a year, thanks to a program funded by Australian Volunteers International.

Her already advanced knowledge of Bahasa Indonesia has enabled Sofi to hold workshops for the LSPPA staff, visit local communities, hold creative workshops for children, organise a study trip to Australia for Lusi Margyani, the director of LSPPA, introduce the P5 parenting program (a Participatory Program Promoting Pleasurable Parenting formulated by Kate Birch), and help train early childhood educators.

I was so caught up by Sofi's energy and determination, I soon found myself clutching the Honda's back bar (looking equally bandit-like), and heading for the LSPPA office to help with the English translation of the centre's website.*

A day later, we headed to Kalibawang, where we were greeted by a laughing, enthusiastic group of villagers. Erry Matahari, Sofi's co-worker, had already started organising the 'show', asking the children their names, and playing games. Then Sofi stepped into the ring. She soon had everyone laughing and involved in her story of an imaginary plane ride to Australia.

> *[The children] seemed to be amused by the concept that, yes, girls could fix trucks too.*

'Nama saya Tricia,' I heard myself repeating, standing in a circle with 40 young Indonesian children.

'Nama saya Agung,' said a small voice beside me. The ice in this equatorial land had been broken.

The creative session began timidly, but soon hands and fingers were red and blue and yellow, producing enormous colourful paintings. Comical figurines, once tubs of play dough, filled trays, and glue was liberally applied to paper and fabric to create collages of familiar Indonesian scenes.

The children 'lost' themselves for two hours of total pleasure and creativity, after which we were all treated to warm, incredibly sweet tea, along with small deliciously sweet cakes, and traditional crispy spring rolls, prepared by the villagers. The children then sat mesmerised as they watched a cartoon on gender equity which had been translated into Bahasa Indonesia. They seemed to be amused by the concept that, yes, girls could fix trucks too.

Later, back at LSPPA, Sofi commended Nignig, one of the facilitators, for sitting down at 'children's level' as she discussed the film with them. In a traditional Indonesian school scene, the teacher would have been standing, and the children would have been sitting still with ramrod-straight backs, straining to maintain attention. Instead, the parents and educators in Kalibawang witnessed a new kind of teaching atmosphere, one where the children felt comfortable with their teacher, where work was play, and where laughter ruled.

People like Sofi Thomson are beginning to change our perception that Indonesia is a faraway, foreign land. In reality, the distance between Indonesia's shores and Australia's is less than that between Sydney and Melbourne. Our shores may be close, but educationally and culturally we are light years apart.

Differences (such as the abhorrence of patting the top of another person's head, pointing or beckoning with a finger, or sitting cross-legged with soles upwards) may seem strange to easy-going Australians; in effect, these differences underline the difficulties faced by educators such as Sofi and the staff at LSPPA who are attempting to bring about change.

Sofi is straightforward in her attitude: 'At times these strong cultural and religious beliefs test my skills in delivering the message of the UNICEF Convention on the Rights of the Child,' she says.

As innovative training methods for early childhood educators and parents continue to aid in the healthy development of the children of Indonesia, and creative workshops continue to captivate these delightful children, Sofi Thomson and her co-workers at LSPPA hope that the new ways of the 21st century will soon become a reality in this beautiful land so close to our northern shores.

Tricia Timmermans
Photojournalist
Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

*LSPPA website: http://www.lsppa.or.id

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REVIEWS

Rethinking Gender in Early Childhood Education

Glenda MacNaughton
Sydney: Allen and Unwin (2000)
ISBN: 1 86508 036 5 RRP: $32.89

Rethinking Gender in Early Childhood Education by Glenda MacNaughton constitutes an excellent resource for teaching 'poststructuralist' approaches to gender issues in early childhood, since it gradually builds up complex ideas and models. It explores a number of useful and interesting ideas—poststructuralist explanations of gender identity development, different views about equity in early childhood teaching, and tips for enlisting parents and other staff members—in highly accessible language.

MacNaughton challenges biological and sociological accounts of gender identity formation, suggesting that poststructuralist theory offers a more useful (and credible) model for understanding, and responding to, issues of inequality in early childhood classrooms. She examines these questions through vignettes of children and teachers involved in her action research project. This rich material illustrates the complexity of gender equity issues and adds depth to her analysis.

'Gender equity' is often treated as a policy framework to assist girls in expanding their horizons, and MacNaughton does touch on girls' worlds. However, some of the more poignant stories in this text concern boys who are attempting to negotiate the powerful and highly regulated meanings of male identity. Four-year-old 'Tom' told MacNaughton that he 'didn't like being a boy because boys hurt other people and kill people lots. But he didn't want anyone else to know.' Tom recognised the 'contradictions' in different ways of 'being' a boy and had 'silenced who he was around other boys of his own age'.

Rethinking Gender suggests a range of strategies to assist Tom with his 'struggle' and encourage other children in his class to 'narrate ... different stories about being boys and being girls.' I can think of no more urgent task. This excellent text is a must for any early childhood educator interested in gender issues.

Megan Grant
AECA Research and Policy Officer

Ready for School ... or Not?

Riet Taal
Victoria: Wrightbooks (2000)
ISBN: 1 876627 20 4 RRP: $17.95

This book recognises the concern faced by parents as they consider whether or not their child is ready to start school. While the book highlights differences across states—including the ages of eligibility for school and terminology used for the first year of school—much of the initial discussion refers to the situation in Victoria.

The author argues against younger children going to school as soon as they are eligible, citing research where teachers regard younger children as disadvantaged compared with older school starters. Not reported is research which suggests that teacher expectations play a major role in school success, and, where age is a factor, it accounts for very little long-term variation in children's performance at school.

The author questions the appropriateness of formal readiness tests and programs, suggesting that consultation with teachers in school and prior-to-school settings be used instead of, or at least as well as, these. Despite this, one chapter and an appendix details an extensive list of skills required for school entry. Certainly, some of these skills make life much easier for a child starting school. However, not all children will start school with these capabilities.

The book presents advice for parents and some suggestions to smooth the transition to school. There is a strong sense of children adjusting to the school, rather than the school recognising the diversity among their students and responding to this. Many schools have developed transition programs which promote a sense of partnership with families, valuing the growth and development which has already occurred and aiming to build on that. In these contexts, starting school is more about developing relationships than about skills.

This book could prove useful for parents, especially in raising issues to discuss with early childhood educators in school and prior-to-school settings.

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Home is Where the Family is: Moving House with Children

Pam Linke

Canberra: AECA (2000)

ISBN: 1 875 89 046 7 RRP: $14.96 (incl.p&h and GST)

'Home is where the family is. Relationships matter much more than the place where you live' (p.2). This is the focus of the publication, *Home is Where the Family is: Moving House with Children*, by Pam Linke, a trained social worker who manages the Child and Youth Health website.

This publication is very informative and comprehensive, and will be of interest to many *Every Child* readers and parents.

The chapter headings address the full spectrum of change, particularly focusing on managing change as it relates to the special needs of children. Experiencing the emotions of change is different for all of us, and can range from fear and anxiety to pleasure and enjoyment.

Each chapter includes many practical, well-researched ideas and strategies that families, as well as professionals, can employ in order to ease the anxiety sometimes experienced by children who are 'on the move', either to a new house, a new school, or a new child care arrangement. Ms Linke explains that moving can be an opportunity to provide excitement to family life; a positive learning adventure.

Of particular interest to readers is the presentation of the dialogue. Each chapter is succinct and easy to read, with the key focus of the text highlighted in the margins. The selective use of photographs of children enhances the readability of the publication. The guide to children's stages of development and responses to change provides parents and professionals with increased knowledge and understanding of how children learn, grow and develop.

We all need to belong in the world. Children need our support, understanding, and care. To be aware and understand is to know how to help children embrace changes in their lives with a positive attitude and enthusiasm. Enjoy the read!

Narelle Hargreaves
Director of Schools Directorate and International Education
ACT Department of Education

Circle of Influence: Implementing Shared Decision Making and Participative Management

Paula Jorde Bloom

Illinois, USA: New Horizons Publishing

ISBN: 0-9621894-3-X RRP: $41.50

Once again, Paula Jorde Bloom has managed to entertain as well as educate. This latest publication, from *The Director's Toolbox: A Management Series for Early Childhood Administrators*, addresses issues faced daily by many of us at the 'coal-face' of staff management.

The concept of 'participative management', although new to some, has been around in the corporate sector for many years, under the guise of total quality mamagement (TQM), quality circles, democratic management, etc. What makes this book so special is its relevance to the early childhood profession. Its easy-to-read style encourages the reader to reflect on current decision-making practice and change in the way decisions are made in the workplace.

This book raises awareness regarding the philosophy of participative management, and how a director's behaviour influences every facet of the daily running of the centre. It challenges the reader to consider new management techniques to empower staff and achieve centrewide goals.

Can *Circle of Influence* enhance our professional skills and workplaces? The answer is 'yes' in the following ways:

- To understand the decision-making process.
- To look at the types of decisions we make daily.
- To understand and evaluate the practice of decision-making.
- To get feedback from staff regarding the organisation of the workplace.
- To increase trust amongst staff.
- To make better decisions.

This book would be an asset to any busy professional leading a team in the early childhood profession. It's a 'must read'!

Debbie Harrod
Director
The Forest UnitingCare Preschool, NSW

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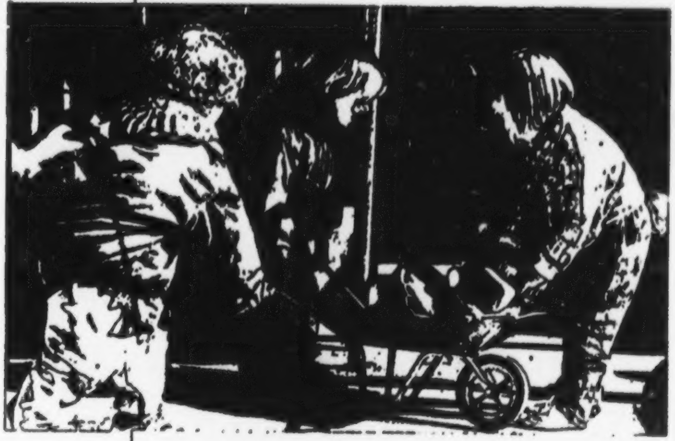

Make the most of email

Communicating via email is so easy that it can lead to sloppy habits. Manage email efficiently with these techniques:

- **Keep it simple.** Limit emails to plain text unless others request graphic data that requires advanced formatting. Sending slow-to-download files can also irritate recipients.
- **File emails.** After you read incoming emails, archive them in designated mailboxes on your PC. Label them for ready reference later. *Warning:* don't assume you need a hard copy of every email; printing each message wastes time and paper.
- **Check messages regularly.** Establish a daily routine to scan incoming email, and tell colleagues and clients when they can expect your reply, e.g. promise to check email before 9 a.m., at lunch, and before heading home.
- **Maintain a professional tone.** Email's informality can be a curse if you share inappropriate jokes or write impulsive comments. *Rule of thumb:* before sending your message, imagine it will appear in the front page of your organisation's internal newsletter.

Adapted from *Leadership for the Front Lines*, Bureau of Business Practice, (800) 243-0876.

Build cooperation without nagging

To spur co-workers to cooperate:

- **Be direct.** If you want something done, ask. Co-workers can resist hints and innuendos.
- **Ban blaming.** Finding fault can prevent both sides from seeking another way to solve a problem. If you're blamed, let it slide and say, 'Let's look at the facts.' *Last resort:* Get an outside party to help.
- **Stay focused.** Don't generalise by saying, 'You never finish on time.' Note only the current offence. Ask, 'How can I help you finish on time next time?'
- **Negotiate.** Instead of demanding, ask, 'What do you need to finish by the deadline?' Then suggest ways to help.
- **Realign priorities.** People who don't cooperate have different priorities. To make theirs the same as yours, show how you both will benefit by completing the task, e.g. 'Once we get this done, we'll be able to move on to that project you wanted to do.'
- **Say less.** Some people resent following orders, so be subtle, e.g. post an itemised goal list.
- **Let it go.** If you find yourself nagging others too much, it may be time to evaluate your own duties. Are you trying to compensate for your own lack of progress? Recognise the time and effort colleagues put into the process.

Teamwork tips

- **To referee a team squabble,** ask the combatants to list three concrete solutions to their feud. Review their options privately. Then take the best of each of their proposals to craft a workable solution.
- **Urge team members** to discuss-not vote on-important decisions and to settle for substantial rather than unanimous agreement. (Parker, G. *Team Players and Teamwork.* Jossey-Bass, (415) 433-1767)

The above information first appeared in *Communication Briefings*, www.briefings.com (800) 888-2086, and is reproduced with kind permission from Briefings Publishing Group.

Practising workshop facilitation

The facilitator's roles in moving the CONTENT forward are to make sure:

- that we are addressing the relevant sides of the issues;
- that we are going deep enough;

- that we are going broad enough;
- that we know who has information or knowledge on the issue and that they have the appropriate time to share it;
- that we help resource people or 'experts' to adjust to the group, if they are losing people;
- that the questions we ask generate enthusiasm, creativity, and touch the essence of what the group wants;
- that data and information is generated, analysed, synthesised and integrated, and that it is the basis for decisions; and
- that there is evaluation and planning of next steps.

The facilitator's roles in moving the PROCESS forward are to make sure:

- that everyone is participating and contributing, and feels safe to do so;
- that not one person or group dominates;
- that everyone feels they have been heard and respected;
- that people know where they are in the course of the day and week ... they seek linkages and meanings;
- that the questions we ask generate enthusiasm, creativity and touch the essence of what the group wants;
- that we develop a shared sense of responsibility for the content, process, and results ... a co-responsibility for the management; and
- that we predict problems and issues that may arise, diagnose the causes of the difficulties when they do arise, and mobilise sources of support and analysis to aid the planning of next steps.

The above information is extracted from 'Workshops as a space for individual and collective change' by Tom Lent, which appears in *Early Childhood Matters*, No. 96, October 2000, pp. 27-36. It is reproduced with kind permission from the Bernard van Leer Foundation.

AECA Online

AECA Online aims to support good practice in the use of information and communications technologies (ICT) in early childhood.

Services are increasingly looking towards online technologies to both promote their services and to improve business and educational practices. Whether you are looking for programming ideas, information for parents or children, or professional development support, there is a wide range of websites relevant to the early childhood sector.

AECA provides information about new and interesting early childhood websites by supporting the *New in Early Childhood* service available through EdNA. This service emails a regular update of new early childhood sites to subscribers. Subscribe to this service at http://www.edna.edu.au/EdNA and select 'What's New'.

Information about useful websites can be emailed to Jennifer Grossi at AECA: jenny@aeca.org.au

Useful websites

Five senses

Southwest Education Development Laboratory

http://www.sedl.org/scimath/pasopartners/senses/welcome.html

Lesson plans for the five senses including an objectives grid for mathematics, science, and language. Age level four to six years.

Museum of Childhood

http://www.ecu.edu.au/ses/museum/

The Museum of Childhood, located at Edith Cowan University in Western Australia, contains extensive resources related to the history of child care, family life, and children's education; including toys, dolls, and games of yesteryear. The site also details services, suggested activities for various groups of students visiting the museum, opening hours, and booking information.

Mumsweb.com

http://www.mumsweb.com/index.htm

A new website targeting Australian families and, in particular, mothers. This site focuses on health and child development, and includes a marketplace and child care centre directory.

Elstead Nursery

http://www.elstead.com.au/

The Elstead Nursery website is a good example of how child care services can promote their business online. The site provides information about the programs and services offered by the centre, and includes a secure parent portal.

Our Children The Future Early Childhood Conference

our Children the future

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Following from the success of the first Our Children The Future Conference, people with an interest in preschools, junior primary education, child care, family day care, out of school hours care and early learning programs are invited to attend this conference. Keynote speakers include Sir William Taylor, Lilian Katz, Douglas Powell, Therese Kiley and Philip Gammage. Other speakers include Kathy Hall (UK), Galzar Ahmad (Pakistan), Alison Elliot, Rick Sarre, Anne Sved Williams, Marilyn Fleer, Glenda MacNaughton, Karen Orr Vered, Denis Ralph, Wendy Schiller, Toni Downes, Louise Porter, Wendy Shepherd, Ken Rigby, Lindy Petersen, Elizabeth Dau plus a range of local and national practitioners and policy makers. Registration is $275.00 (earlybird by 9/3/01) shared and sessional registrations are also available.

Contact Shane Maddocks, Department of Education, Training and Employment, Ph 08 8226 0856, Fax 08 8226 0099, email Maddocks.Shane@saugov.sa.gov.au

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Guidelines for consulting with young children

At its Annual Council meeting AECA adopted the following policy on consulting with young children. This policy is the result of two years consultation between AECA members and state branches and represents AECA's position on this issue.

AECA believes that:

- **Children must be consulted.** The process by which they are consulted must reflect commitment to maintain the dignity and welfare of children and their families. All those consulting with children must adhere to the accepted guidelines of professional and ethical practice. Professional and ethical practice includes consideration of each situation with reference to context, time, environment, acknowledgment of key players and their values, legal aspects, professional principles, and ethical principles.
- **Children's views must be valued and treated with respect.** Due consideration must always be given in any situation where a child expresses themself. In the process of consultation and consequent representation these views and a child's perspective is to be valued.
- **The privacy of all children must be respected at all times.** Information collected in the process of consultation must not be used inappropriately. While confidentiality can never be absolute, information must be treated in a professional, legal, and ethical way.
- **Best practice.** When interacting with young children is based on sound knowledge, research and theories, in early childhood.
- Any adults interacting with children in a professional or personal role should adhere to principles that reflect respect for children's rights.

Policy principles

- The underlying principles related to this policy reflect adherence and commitment to the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Australian Early Childhood Association's Code of Ethics.
- Children are active in constructing their understanding of their world.
- Children's autonomy and initiative must be respected.
- Children must be empowered to express their views and to expect that their views will be taken into account.
- It is essential that young children are consulted in matters that affect them. This consultation may be specific to individual situations or may involve a representative group to inform more general practices.
- From birth a child is capable of expressing views and is able to make them known, especially to those attuned to interacting with young children.
- At times young children are not able to speak for themselves in forums/situations which may have an impact on their future experiences. In these situations groups and individuals who represent young children must have the opportunity to speak for them. In order to be a voice for children, advocates must consult with children and their families.
- Every effort must be made to ensure that it is the voice of young children that is heard. Adults must acknowledge the children's perspective in any representation they make on their behalf. The opinions of young children and representation of their experiences must be sought out. When interpreted or presented to others this information should maintain the truth as viewed by the children consulted. A child's opinion must be valued for its validity to their perspective.
- Advocates for children must be authentic representatives who value and honour individuality and diversity. Any interpretation of data gathered from consultation with children must be done based on a sound understanding of contemporary early childhood theory.
- Consent must be obtained from children and their families in order to include them in any process of data gathering. The purpose of the consultation must be made clear to the children and their families. Children are to have any process they are involved in explained to them at a level which they can understand.
- Children must not be placed in any situation or environment that presents a threat to their health or wellbeing. In consulting with children adults must consider the children's health and wellbeing at all times.
- Children must not be intimidated or interrogated in any way and they must be given sufficient time to respond.

- No form of deception should be involved in consulting with children. Children must be respected. Adults must be honest at all times when consulting with children.
- Parents, family members, early childhood professionals, researchers, and advocacy groups can be advocates for children. They must consult with children and their families to be effective advocates. They have the responsibility of making decisions and acting in ways that promote and protect the rights of young children (Rodd, 1998).

Implementation strategies

- The specialist early childhood knowledge or expertise of any adult who provides support during any consultation with children needs to be assessed. The context and needs of a child will influence this assessment. For example, knowledge of paediatric health may be important in one situation. In another situation a good understanding of cognitive and social development of young children may be essential.
- Someone with specialist early childhood knowledge acting as an advocate for the child should always be present when consultations are being conducted with children if their family members cannot be present.
- When consulting with children individual family culture must be considered.
- Questions addressed to children must be age/stage appropriate in style, content, complexity, and length.
- When questioning children, it is important that those involved have an understanding of how children recall information.
- Consideration must be given to how much questioning needs to occur to obtain relevant information.
- Environments in which any consultation takes place must be assessed as being appropriate and authentic for the children and families involved.
- Children need to be provided with sufficient appropriate information to express a meaningful opinion.
- Individualised planned communication of the purpose of any consultation must be developed to meet the needs of a child in any particular situation.
- Support structures are put in place to ensure consulting with young children is inclusive of all children, e.g. children with a language other than English; children with disabilities.
- Special consideration needs to be given to consulting with very young children, e.g. infants.

Background Material

- Australian Early Childhood Association Code of Ethics.
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- Schiller, W. (1989) 'A Fair Go' for children: An early childhood perspective on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 14 (20), 15–20.
- Wiersma, W. (1995) *Research Methods on Education: An Introduction*. 6th edn. Needham Heights, Massachusetts: Allyn & Bacon.

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Topsy Turvy

Debate on NSW Corporal Punishment Bill

This article first appeared in Rights Now, *September 2000. It is reproduced here with kind permission from the National Children's and Youth Law Centre.*

Children are the off-stage extras in a political pantomime that has been taking place in New South Wales. The topsy-turvy nature of the parliamentary debate on a Bill to limit the use of parental corporal punishment would make an excellent scenario for a Gilbert and Sullivan Operetta.

The law in NSW currently allows parents and carers to use corporal punishment to correct a child's misbehaviour, provided no more than reasonable force is used. Unlike some other Australian states, the right of parents to use reasonable chastisement is part of the common law and is not incorporated into NSW statute law.

> *... Laws which permit corporal punishment breach the Convention on the Rights of the Child*

In NSW as elsewhere the issue of corporal punishment has stirred public debate with a polarisation of attitudes between those who see smacking as a natural and effective means of disciplining children and those who view physical punishment as a form of violence and argue that children should have no lesser protection than adults from family violence.

Hon. Alan Corbett, an independent member for NSW upper house, has for four years been promoting an amendment to the law which would incorporate in statute law the right of parents to smack their children but would place limitations on that right. His latest initiative, the *Crimes Amendment (Child Protection—Excessive Punishment) Bill*, was introduced into the legislative council on 5 May 2000. It provides that parents and carers may punish their children with a smack to the body administered with an open hand but would ban:

- The use of a stick, strap or other object
- Any blow to the neck or head
- Any blow likely to cause harm to the child for more than a short period

Alan Corbett's original Bill has been hedged around with qualifications and exceptions in response to his broad consultations. The most recent version allows the use of a stick, strap or other object and/or a blow to the neck or head if it is administered 'in a manner that could reasonably be considered trivial or negligible in all the circumstances'. The revised Bill also extends the definition of 'parent or person acting for a parent' to include other persons, who in aboriginal communities exercise special responsibilities in relation to the child.

One might have thought that such a Bill would receive widespread support as offering a compromise between total abolition of the right to hit children and the current law, which fails to protect children against the possibility of injury or abuse. This has not proved to be the case. Both the governing Labor party and the opposition Liberal Coalition are opposing the Bill. In effect, they are saying that parents should not only be allowed to hit their children but they should be free to hit them with a stick or strap, and to hit them around the head and face. This makes a mockery of child protection and domestic violence laws intended to protect children from violence and abuse. It also defies the UN Committee and the Rights of the Child which has consistently taken the view that laws which permit corporal punishment breach the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

> *... Children should have no lesser protection than adults from family violence*

Although Mr Corbett had been led to believe that the Labor Government would support his private members' Bill in its amended form, he learned just days before it was introduced that Cabinet had decided not to support it. During two days of debate on the Bill no Government member spoke of the issue, so the Government's reasons for reneging on their support for the Bill were never given. One opposition speaker suggested that labor's unwillingness to support the Bill was a result of an assurance given by the Minister for Education some years ago. It is said that, when corporal punishment was banned in schools, the Labor party gave an assurance that it would not interfere with the parental right to use corporal punishment.

Because the Government did not support the Bill, the opposition also decided not to support it. The first speaker for the opposition, a former NSW attorney-general, said he would vote for the Bill, despite his party's decision not to support it, pointing out that the law on corporal punishment was in need of clarification. The second opposition speaker indicated that the opposition did not support the Bill but proceeded to raise a number of arguments in favour of limiting corporal punishment, pointing to the unsatisfactory nature of the common law principle and the need to protect children from violence. He went on to express a personal view that he supported the Bill and that he saw the need for a clear statement that belting a child is a criminal offence. He indicated that the reason why the opposition did not support the Bill was that the Government did not support it—truly Gilbertian reasoning.

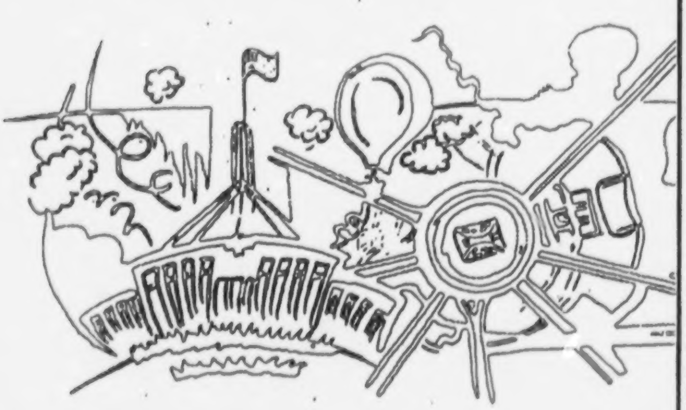
Members of the minor parties—the Democrats, Greens, and even the Shooters Party (not known for their liberal views) spoke in support of the Bill, as did the independents in the upper house. Of the ten members who expressed a view on the Bill, only three raised arguments against it. The strongest opponent was Fred Nile of the Christian Democrat Party. Another opponent said that she supported the principles behind the Bill but queried the detail.

... The issue of corporal punishment has stirred public debate

The Bill has received the support of the Commissioner for Children and Young People and a wide range of child protection organisations, human rights bodies, legal, health, and education professional bodies, and the NSW Ethnic Communities Council.

The Bill, which had seemed to be dead in the water, was given a last minute reprieve when it was referred to a standing committee for consideration and report back. It can only be hoped that the outcome will be influenced by matters of principle rather than the political game-playing that has characterised its progress to date.

Children deserve better.



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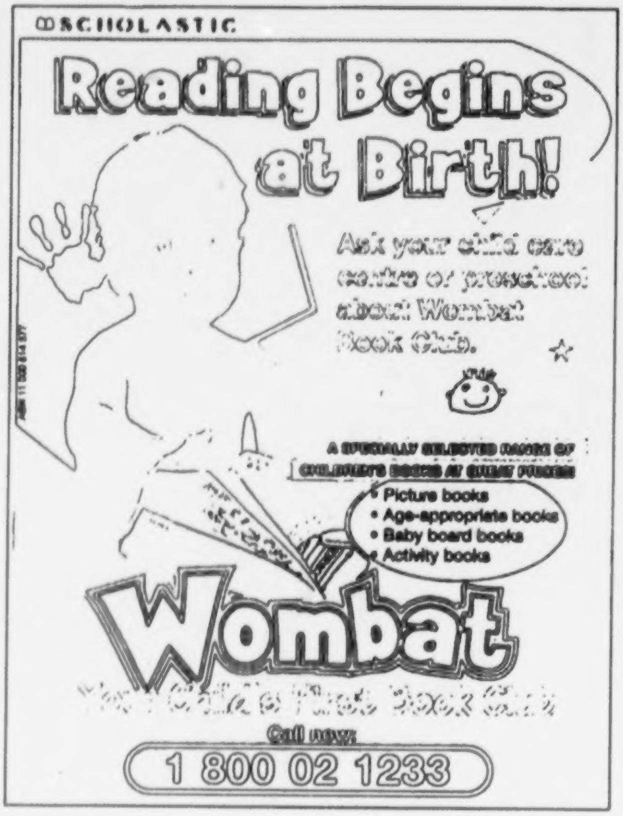
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The latest title from AECA

Home is Where the Family is: Moving House with Children

By Pam Linke

Children often lack the skills needed to cope with major changes, such as moving house. This is because they do not have the experience of previous changes to remember and build on. In this new book, published by AECA in collaboration with the Australian Defence Force, Pam Linke discusses how parents and carers can make children's transitions to new homes and schools easier. It includes useful suggestions on how to make moving house an adventure, and is an essential guide for helping children manage change.

RRP $14.96 (inc. GST and p&h)

To order your copy contact:
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Moving house with children

Moving house is about change. Changes can have greater impact on young children because they don't have the experience of previous changes to remember and build on. If a move is managed well, children can learn new skills and benefit from the experience.

Above all, remember that home is where the family is, and that relationships matter much more than the place where you live.

Preparing children for the move

- Talk about the move as an adventure that will involve exciting new discoveries in the house, the garden, the neighbourhood, and the town.
- Keep a big list of the steps and stages of the move in a place where everyone can see it (and add to if they wish).
- Young children don't always know the words to ask about what is worrying them—so keep them informed.
- Make sure your children know that the family and all the special things are going to be together in the new place.

Packing

- Give older children the responsibility for a special task, e.g. packing their toys. Show you appreciate their help.
- They can help with cleaning out unwanted belongings. It is important not to clean out children's things when they are not there.
- It is better not to throw out young children's belongings, because they may not understand that what they throw out will not be there for them when they next want it. This is particularly important with dummies or other comforters. These objects help children to build a bridge between the known and the unknown, and are especially important in times of change.
- Make a pack of things for each child to take on the trip. Include some toys for them to have as soon as they arrive.

Settling into your new home

- Do a safety check of the home as soon as you get there, e.g. electricals, hot water, etc.
- Unpack the children's sleeping and special toys as soon as possible. Young children feel more secure in a new place if they have familiar things around them.
- Set up your youngest children's rooms first, and arrange the furniture in the same way it was before. If they wake in the night it will feel familiar.
- Try to maintain the family routines your children are used to.

Meeting new friends

- Teach your children how to be friendly with others. They will learn a lot about this by watching you.
- Enrol the children in craft groups, sports clubs, etc.
- Remind children that they are lucky they have two lots of friends—their new home friends and their old home friends.

Settling into a new school

- Explore the school so the children know where to find the tuckshop, library, toilets, etc., and organise an after-school pickup spot.
- Take your children to meet their new teacher so they can talk to the teacher about their experiences and feelings. This will mean they also have a familiar face on their first day of class.
- If the schoolwork is very different from what your child has done before, it may help to get some extra tutoring to bridge any learning gaps and help your child's confidence.

Settling into child care

- Find a staff member your child feels comfortable with when you are not there, and stay until he/she is used to the staff.
- Offer to bring something your child knows from your old life, to put up in the centre, e.g. a picture of your old house.
- If your child is very unsettled, for the first few days stay together for only a short while and then both leave. Then leave him/her for short periods, tell him/her that you will be coming back, and do so, until he/she realises that you will always come back.
- Some children are helped by having something of yours to care for while you are not there.

Source: *Home is Where the Family is: Moving House With Children*, by Pam Linke. Canberra: AECA (2000) $14.96 (incl. p&h and GST)

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- Enrol in the **Diploma of Community Services (Children's Services)** at Central TAFE and receive a minimum of twelve months exemption from your degree at Edith Cowan University.

For more ***DETAILS*** contact:

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Dr Margaret Sims
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Accolades

de Lissa Institute of Early Childhood and Family Studies

Early childhood graduates

A group of highly imaginative students will graduate as early childhood teachers from the de Lissa Institute of Early Childhood and Family Studies, University of South Australia in December 2000.

These students studied Practicum 8 in Semester 2, 2000 as part of their Bachelor of Early Childhood Education Degree. It was my privilege to be their lecturer and tutor.

For their final assignment the group demonstrated initiative and flair, proposing that they determine the assignment and the process. The resulting group project was a practical resource for first-year-out teachers, entitled www.help!.edu.au Teaching Tips 2000. Vision and leadership from within the group provided the impetus for the idea to flourish, and all group members supported the project with enthusiasm and vigour. The students were involved in the development of a project plan, involving team work, communication skills, negotiation, resource management, commitment, and evaluation.

Their goal to produce a practical resource was achieved through a highly collaborative process. The first print run has sold out.

So congratualtions and good luck to:

Katy Annis, Cassie Austin, Narelle Baguley, Tanya Ballantyne, Cassie Belcher, Angela Booy, Lyn Bowie, Peta Brown, Adele Busch, Tiffany Coad, Megan Colbey, Amber Colwell, Anna Couche, Samatha Eglinton, Millie Fielder, Sarah Foster, Nikia Gepp, Tameeka Goetze, Louise Hanrahan, Kristy Hodgins, Melissa Hunter, Emily Jarick, Kylie Judd, Maria Labbozzetta, Natalie Lambert, Tricia Leighton, Cassandra Lennon, Jan Lister, Rebecca Little, Jodie May, Lauren Minge, Kate O'Loughlin, Lee-Anne Parslow, Rebecca Parsons, Amy Perry, Matthew Perry, Melissa Ramm, Stacey Richter, Michelle Roast, Joanne Semmens, Crystal Skuse, Cassie Smith, Olivia Smith, Naomi Strybos, Megan Symons, Courtney Thorogood, Connie Tiani, Rosa Tripodi, Sharee Tunks, Kelly Turner, Lee Van Tenac, Kate Underwood, Beth Veall, Sarah Whiteside, Prue Williams, and Lauren Wiseman.

> *Every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes, while this modification effects, whether we wish it or not, the quality of subsequent experiences. The principle of continuity of experience means that every experience both takes something from those who have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those who come after* (Dewey, 1968, p.35).

Elspeth Harley
Senior Lecturer
de Lissa Institute of Early Childhood and Family Studies

Reference

Dewey, J. (1968) *Education and Experience.* NY: Collier Books.

Ana Watson

Ana was born in Venezuela, the eldest of eight children, in a family with few financial resources but great cohesion. She married and became a mother in her teenage years, then travelled to Scotland where she met her present husband. Together they migrated to Adelaide, to be with her husband's parents. For many years, Ana worked in a range of jobs, mainly as a school assistant in several preschools. She is known in her community as an advocate for disadvantaged people, for her high level of knowledge and skill, and for hard work.

Ana Watson was awarded a degree in interpreting in 1992 and an Associate Diploma in Social Sciences and Childcare from TAFE in 1995. She then studied for the de Lissa Institute four-year full-time undergraduate Bachelor of Early Childhood Education award while working full-time, completing the course in only five years. A remarkable achievement for any student, let alone a parent and grandparent who was working full-time, studying part-time, and who learnt English as an adult.

Victoria Whitington
Lecturer in Child Development
de Lissa Institute of Early Childhood and Family Studies

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